

Bowery

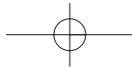
You stony dark Bowery!
You are king of wayward souls,
Your holy scepter is a cloud full of pain,
Faithful servants sanctify your fine name,
Packs of dogs bow before your crown . . .

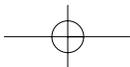
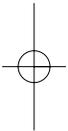
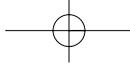
In your gardens bloom the fallen
Fall leaves of proud sycamores,
In your palaces lost hopes are sunk
Your stones are faded away, from old prostitutes,
Your gutters bloodied by fallen drunkards.

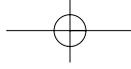
Upon your sick promiscuous breast
The dark snakes spread out from the night
And sharpen the unsheathed sword of their burning poisons
And in a limping faded-out prostitute
The extinguished pupils of wax-yellowed eyes wink away
And dogs and tramps drag her body to hidden city-tents.

You stony dark Bowery!
You are the mother of ripped up dreams
Your children suck the moldy good time
Of your bloodied breasts
Your children wear the black veil of the dark of night
Your children for want are eternal slaves.

Passaic, New Jersey, July 26th 1925

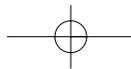
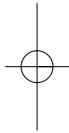


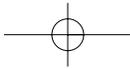
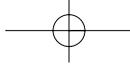


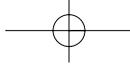


Three Sisters

1932







1

So many V's burning Vis-à-Vis
When strong nights huddle threefold
And all are

mine mine
mine

And in eVery V embedded
Is eVery sister — my ViVid poem.
A lonely spider dreamt them up
On a blind windowpane in my hollow house.

Cracks catch their shadows,
Reincarnations fleeing from somewhere.
I love all three of them,
And walk, with open distances,
Past nights in love.

One appears before my eyes
A last twilight in a death chamber.
I walk toward her as through a mirror
With steps of an alien visitor
And pry her open like a sealed wonder.
In my walk, she hears
The clang of a gravedigger's spade —
And she declines as languidly
As the fluttering of a dying crow
Somewhere in a lonely nest.

MENKE

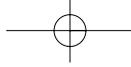
One with transparent loins
Clamoring to roll up her dress
Bends ripe
Like full wheat before the scythe,
As if soon — no steps, no words —
Someone will emerge from lustful nights
And Violate her in the street
Against the sun.

And the third,
In her autumn, unheard,
With a blank gaze
At the march of time,
Turned gray in the haze
Of seeking herself
With no reason or rhyme.

In the hunchbacked dark — extinguished days
Concatenated in a row.
My shadow — a spiteful corpse,
Mocks me on the crumpled pillow.

The three sisters — my most beautiful poems
Grow ripe in my dream, brown and blond,
And I, with lustful limbs,
With the sorrow of two starving days
On my sleepless bed,

I sing the song of the three
And sense, how Vis-à-Vis,
On dirty linen, the moon
Dreams of my poems.



THREE SISTERS

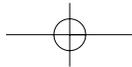
The First Sister

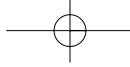
Boy from the land of night,
Tear off my sheer gown.
Naked, shameless shall I lie before you.
Just the narrow band, green in my hair,
Will watch our game in awe.
The moon split in half,
Hugging our cloth on the floor,
Hiding in every fold.

In ripe Verses of an infant poem
Take me apart.
Let wonder not be ashamed of wonder.
I lie open before you, glowing,
I hear
The whisper of limb to limb.

Find me
In the distances of a dreamed up world,
Crumble over me
As a belated rain over a thirsty field.

Dissolve me in worlds of madness,
I shall darken extinguished on your bed
And look long
With blank gaze,
As a stopped clock hand — at hours that passed.





MENKE

Her Three Unborn Boys

1

They gaze, hollow, out of the smallest shoes
In glimmering windows of full stores,
They write unwritten poems
On untouched pages of black albums.

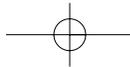
In sunsets, they peep out gray
As dots of awe facing God,
Graying in the echoes
Of every metropolis.

They would have been little boys,
Each prettier than the prettiest bum.
Through blind dangers, they would have seen
A barefoot girl at a simple well.

They would all have been — You,
Homeless lords of backyards,
With disheveled chestnut hair
They would have fled from the day.

They would all have been — You,
The singing blades of street and wind,
Their sins would be played
By an angel on a harp.

But I cajoled them to a gravedigger,
And of my little boys remained
Only my cleaned-up womb,
And of my little boys remained
Only an eternally aborted night.



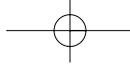
THREE SISTERS

Of their summers,
The wind did not gather flowers,
Graves did not wait for them —
Of every little boy remained
Only a sheaf of mowed years,
Of every little boy remained
Only baskets with berries and pears
In the goiters of heavy midwives.

So I changed my boys into dungheaps,
Crumbs of sun in skimpy dawns
Roam in their years —
And they are the scarlet patches
On hollow, porous huts,
And they look in the mirrors
Of bird-dripped bars —
Like dreamed-up warriors
With old forgotten swords,
Striding one over the other
As a golden death.

So I changed my boys into dungheaps,
Crumbs of sun in skimpy dawns
Roam in their years —
And like dawning hands, they crawl
From bleeding cracks of a slaughterhouse,
Embrace

The snorting heads of calves and sheep,
Tear open
The calf lashes of happy
Slaughtered cow fetuses,
Conduct with their eyebrows
An unborn conversation.



MENKE

2

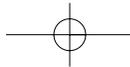
In heavy spiderweb — unsettled spiders
Swing their bodies.
In heavy spiderweb — unsettled spiders
Have hidden my boys.

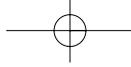
At night — on my specked ceiling
A gas pipe writes them in soot.
And I, chained to my walking sleep,
Count the heaps of steps,
I would stone myself with the walls
If I missed counting one step.

In heavy dust,
Their unspoken words assemble.
If word-dust would chatter,
If an unborn voice would cry —
Silence would lead a silent band.

With a noose, I choke
My satin dress alive,
And with unborn eyes, dead,
I walk in my external house
And hear:
Three boys turning in the wind,
And think —
It's time to nurse my boys.

O prettiest bum of streets and songs,
They will meet you on your last threshold
And drip at your lying head
Like hot paraffin,
And disappear —
Like the wave of parting hands
At the sadness of parting ships.





The Second Sister

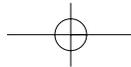
Sad boy with the shining restlessness
Of wolf's eyes facing the hunter's rifle,
I come to you
Like a distant wailing of bloody bushes,
And mix
The withering leaves of my young years.

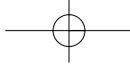
At twelve I was a whore,
I wound my body around all and sundry,
Now I am dirty on a clean bed,
My festive table is set with lust.

Among the loaded rifles of trains in Polesia,
Carrying beast's blood,
Against sun and barricades,
I let my blondness stray
In the unbuttoned laps of guys of the knife.

The distance flew over graves,
Tried to challenge death —
On rushing rails death sang
Of dead ravens infesting the nests,
On rushing rails, death sang
Of marrow and champagne, smoking
In open skulls — and on veined floors.

Dreams catch me in bleeding woods
And lay me down — dead and hollow
As a corpse on a cleansing-board.
Over me,
Rotten limbs swarm
And crumble me up as a maggoty flowerbed.

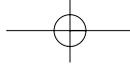




MENKE

Somewhere, chattering crickets
Tell my secrets to heaps of skeletons.
Somewhere, in overgrown ditches,
There is still the whiteness of my flesh
On the shot-through bellies of dead bullies.





THREE SISTERS

The Third Sister

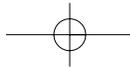
On silent graveyards
She strays alone,
Knocks with cold fingers
On engraved stone.

With night and space
She lightly bends
The eternal silence of the dead,
And measures the graves from end to end
With quiet steps and autumn hours.

* *
*

My rushing blood — my wild unrest
Pries me open as in many windows — at a dark threshold.
I see the three sisters in a dozing distance,
I walk in the dark, alive and bright,
And everything is so awesome and good,
And I want to wail my unrest with the dog-catcher's dogs,
And I want to die seven times of unrest.
Moody lamps shimmer like my blood
And conjure up
A hyacinth on every stone,
And shimmer
A shimmering field on squares and alleys.

Climbing cities rise, ripening in brown steel,
Green houses, overripe,
Fall apart in boredom and ripeness,
Bury themselves in their own pits.



MENKE

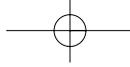
O rushing blood, O wild unrest —
How shall I,
Abandoned and winding, like alleys,
Scatter in the crooked dark?
How shall I,
Like alleys abandoned and winding,
Dream upon crumpled blades?

O, rushing blood, O wild unrest,
Darker and duller
Houses are hiding,
Darker and duller
Threefold figures climb:

Today, one brought me
All the ripeness of sun and rye,
Tomorrow, the second will bring me
Her years in a blond wreath,
And yesterday
The third
Spread her naked shadow
Dead at a fence,
And howled dead
Like a slaughtered antelope.

A shadowy lattice of all three
Trembles on my walls
As expiring glimmer.

One makes my winter house blossom with May —
The living odors of her brown body.



THREE SISTERS

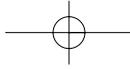
One, with the semen of lice-infested soldiers,
Appears pure —
A twelve-year old girl
With green bands in her blond braids,
Appears pure
As I — the bum with innocence incense.

And one scattered in the stars,
Shimmers like silver on my ashen gas pipe,
Wants to hear,
Star-eyed and calm,
The distant voice of future generations.

So many springs in my winter house
Dissolve in aromatic limbs,
Naked and slim,
And are felled like mown fields
Ripe and languid —
And I walk wild to,
And I walk mild fro,
And sing the song of brown and blond

Like a wonder orchard, full of sap and sadness, am I:
Once upon a time,
Green and drunk
On my bursting manhood,
On my twenty-five summers,



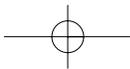


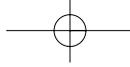
MENKE

Once upon a time,
My own shadow scares me,
Moving faceless to a gallows,
And suddenly dancing — chattering and mad,
As the midnight

drip drip
drop

Of blind, hoarse faucets.





THREE SISTERS

II

Night in Downtown

In my alleys — the gray houses
Clamor for light

Like blind crows with shorn wings.
On the Woolworth Building clock — crawling hands
Devour the last hours of a man condemned to death.

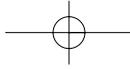
In dark alleys, the silence is taut
Like a rope tightening around a black man's neck.
Through barred panes, someone shows
The last gaze of Sacco and Vanzetti.

Young robbers run
Like sleepwalkers on housetops.
In dirty courtyards
Cats are pregnant — and sick nights hear
The distant, choked rustle
Of half-slaughtered children.

In moldy cellars — wretched years
Look mad and extinguished,
Like flickering candles in graveyard cleansing-rooms.

Sickly thin hands
Swing dusty swings.
Pale children grow
On flat breasts of sick mothers.



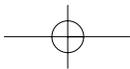
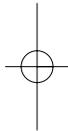


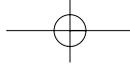
MENKE

In secret corners
Poisonous stains turn scarlet,
Showing a long-forgotten face
Of a consumptive child.

Narrow ropes
Stretched like sleepy snakes.
In an old vestibule
The black of a beggar's stick.

On church steps
Withered whores dozing,
Imagine themselves in hell
With scorched bodies and cut-off heads.



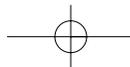


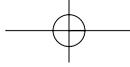
THREE SISTERS

The Sister in Childbirth

Autumn swept her
To a strange door
Like dust of dead leaves.
In a corner —
Night and chilled limbs.

Unborn hands tear at her womb,
Facing here, Death burns on red trees.
And she and gold,
And she and grief,
Huddle closer to the cold wall.





MENKE

In a Freezing House

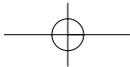
Before naked sucklings — in a freezing house
Poverty appears
In tiny coffins — one foot long,
From every corner,
Thin and newborn, Death plods.

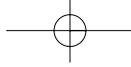
Dull scissors freeze in blue hands,
Sawing a gloomy cloth for shrouds.
A figure from somewhere
Sways to and fro,
Cradles the world in a sandy hand.

A mother bent over the dusty cradle,
Measures the width and height of the corpse —
Far, in the curtained-off mirror,
Hiding, the extinguished dream of sun and bread.

The house speaks with the clamor of night and spade.
Morning joy in mourning,
As the speech of a blind man
Facing the near fires of sunrise.

On black window panes,
Shadows of the dead couple with snowy vases,
Night falls on it all
As the crying of half-slaughtered ravens.



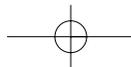


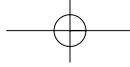
THREE SISTERS

The Three Sisters in a Sleepless Night

1

Everyone's marrow — a smoking rope,
Everyone's gaze — a crawling spider,
Eyes —
Looking far and green.
Hot fever ignites the window panes.
Words — twisted hoops
Rolling in the corners,
Falling, faint with madness,
Like sick butterflies
Around a blazing fireplace.





MENKE

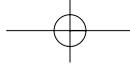
2

Long lashes of a blind girl,
A cold wreath of extinguished hands —
Lovers hear unspoken words,
Frenetic walls in a crooked dance.

In the flickering lamp, their joy
Goes out, up and down,
And plaits of their shadows
A swaying braid.

The blind girl, all her senses in love,
Shuffles to the windows like madness,
Her blindness wraps the bright mirrors.
Monsters draw with black chalk,
Coffins on the walls:

Who will unlock the sun in me,
If not you, my love,
With marrow on mad fingers,
If not you, my love,
Of blind wounds the singer.



THREE SISTERS

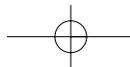
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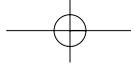
Green cheeks and dry bread
Among dead walls and pictures of the dead,
A black string of wretched days —

One unbraids the boredom in her hands
And seeks a trace of herself
In the dusty picture of a blond child.

One with lashes of mown stalks,
And hours dissolved like loose fetters.

And one, deaf and blind
Stands, chained to herself,
And hears with deaf fingers
The weeping of falling forests.





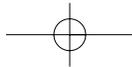
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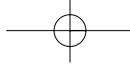
Such a House

In the ancient attic, an insane guy.
A child's coffin, cried-out flowers —
The graveyard silence of my poems,
Of the whole world — a twisted tongue.

A superfluous person is insane even
From dirtying the days — like a living cloud.
Wild nights are full
Of star-eyed fear and the mold of green cracks.

On frosty panes — a dreamed-out snow forest.
On the prettiest tree, the cleansing-board blooms
For you and me.
Of all the sunsets — a bloody stain,
And a consumptive girl, glooming away
Like a declining wind at a lonely piano.





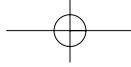
THREE SISTERS

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*

You are coming to me
With the quiet rustle of your word.
You turn me scarlet in a thousand evenings —
So good to be with you in the world
And breathe the simple air.

Now, we're watching
The day's bright steps,
Enjoying the thought
That night will come soon
And bring us calm,
And at night —
Just you and me
And calm, ruined distances.
You are coming to me
With the quiet rustle of your word.
You turn me scarlet in a thousand evenings —
So good to be with you in the world
And breathe the simple air.

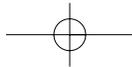
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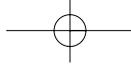


MENKE

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The rags on my body
Tell you of the night and garbage cans
And that I love you bummier than Dick the Thief,
O girl
With field and ripe breasts:
Free as hobo guys,
With the unrest of a thousand trains,
Let us go toward the world.
And as we reach a land,
All the cities are our home.
And as we come to a city,
All the streets are our home,
And every home — sheer windows,
Bright
As the distant wonder-route
In my eyes.





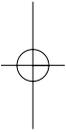
THREE SISTERS

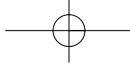
* *
*

Through anguish and steel, the roaring city
Rises above me in restless rigidity
Like a climbing Golem with pecked-out eyes.

Vis-à-vis,
Old ships howl over their leafy childhood,
Fostered in wild birch forests.
Old ships howl over their leafy childhood
And see themselves in a dream — young virgin trees.

Tower spires deconstruct the heights,
As if the city hung herself in boredom.
The sickly face of the moon
Plods above the city
Like a head, peeled out of madness.
And I see the three sisters in the moonshine distance
And sense nearby
The ripeness of their distant limbs.





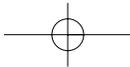
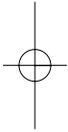
MENKE

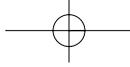
From stony branches, in the stony park,
They ripen down,
As before the unfolding of blossoms,
And greet night with salt and bread.

Their beauty flutters through dangers
Like falling blossoms in the wind.

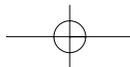
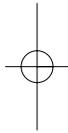
The old park senses
The sap running out of their years.
And the old park
Says in the rustle of leaves:

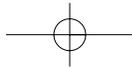
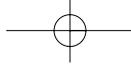
Their days are like cages,
Like narrow walls
Holding poverty tight
In the vise of gray bricks.





III





The Poem of a Bastard

A guy sowed my body
In my mother's womb
Late at night
At an old fence.
My mother was a wife
To every swell guy,
Sometimes — for a linen dress,
Sometimes — for a loaf of bread.

Now,
As my mother understood
How heavy
Tired arms hang on shoulders,
How attached
A gray head sways feverish,
She sits
At the cold light of the gas pipe
And hears:
Lazily crawls her breath in the old blood,
On the yellow cheeks
A tear chases a tear.

Now I feel close
To my own flesh of my stranger father,
I grow strong and insolent
With simple guys on the Bowery,
And seek among them
The swell guy — my father.



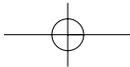
MENKE

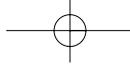
* *
*

I am prettier
Than those whorish woods
That saw you
Roll up your dress — for all and sundry.

I am pretty, O pretty,
Like a suicide in love,
Bent over a moon river,
My blood flows in my veins
As a distant crying of flutes.

Now,
As I toss on my bed
Like a mute tench on hot sand
And think
Of how many guys you are a wife to,
The rusty springs sway
The rush of my roaring blood,
I see you at the outskirts of town
With hot seeds in your cracked body.
Like a bloodied shirt,
Dusk veils the woods,
And you — a naked twelve-year-old girl
Among soldiers with heads condemned to battle.





THREE SISTERS

Night gathers all its sadness
And forms a person like you,
Dragging the mould of your years —
And flickers out
Like candles around a coffin.

In holes of walls
I hid from the world.
Your blondness
Peeps out of rotten cracks.
Extinguished, in horror.

I hear
The world speaking
With a skeleton's dead mouth.
I dream
That of you and me there remained
An abandoned, freezing wasteland —
And I scrub my own skull in fear.

A fly recites the confession on a dot of dust
And tells me her secrets before she dies.

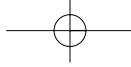
MENKE

I am the lord of backyards,
Of scabby nights and stray cats —
How can I, such a lord, flee
And abandon
My estates — my stray cats?

From my yards
The sun hid in fear.
All around,
The dark withers like a deserted corpse.
Gray, faded figures
Swarming in the dust.

Tatters in love embrace around me,
Wrap my young, hobo bones
With ragged sleeves and crooked shoulders.
The three sisters
Smell of ripe wife and brown cookies.

But I,
Eroded by my own unrest
And strangers' floors,
Howl my hunger through an angry door,
And stray in oxen dreams,
Eager to devour a living field,
To grow gray with evening cattle,
In the moss of an ancient stable,
To look far and ruminating
Through shut walls.



THREE SISTERS

* *
*

I swarm in the sun like maggoty dungheaps
And dig up my days in the heaps of a lonely park.

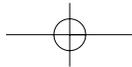
On branches at dawn,
Thin and frenetic as my fingers,
The evening sunset
Of my three sisters — my prettiest poems.

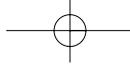
I swarm in the sun like maggoty dungheaps
And dig up my days in the heaps of a lonely park:

Above me,
Dead whores drag a crumpled night
And roam, skeletons like the park,
Among dolled-up, taken-in buyers,
But no one will caress fear itself.

So perhaps they should give themselves to the sun,
And as violated corpses, beg:
Back to the coffins,
Back to the coffins.

O three sisters — my prettiest poems,
I swarm in the sun like maggoty dungheaps
And feel you above me
Like the plodding of dead whores,
And feel you all above me,
With ancient gazes and rotting breasts.





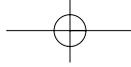
MENKE

The Hunger Dance

A sunset giant climbs atop sirens,
Seeks the highest spire to hang himself.
Slaughtered, the day sways
On cellar panes, on tower noses.
Every street is gilded like a homeless bed.
Red eyes rush,
As red pearls borne on the wind.
Dogs with crumpled hides run
After their own shadows as after tempting prey.
They talk like mutes with their fingers,
And howl like the deaf
The song of superfluous tongues.

Those for whom the street is a homeless bed,
Like me, with their lonely flesh,
Will carve sad circles
On alert stones of pondering street corners,
And understand why
Alleys with scratched faces can wail like people.

The frost won't stop swirling
With his homeless teeth in thin-thin round dances —
And death appears so close and simple,
Rows of corpses emerge from ancient graves
And stop like tombstones, at Jesus's souls —
As if a last call came from somewhere,
Commanding them to melt in the frost.
And the frost won't stop swirling
With his homeless teeth in thin-thin circle dances —
Lips play as on frosty wires:



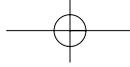
THREE SISTERS

O mute, mute, you hunger of mine,
Show your muteness
In straying eyes and grieving bones,
You're mine, mine, mine.
Lips play like on frosty wires:

O crooked, crooked, you madness of mine,
Show your crookedness
In straying eyes and grieving bones.
I am yours, yours, yours.

Streets wallow like me and you
In the dust of Jesus, in the song of the wind.
And I am — unrest
Of insane eyes and whipped dogs.
And I am — unrest
Of eagles in love, falling from high above —
Abandoned mouths dream of sun and strudel,
Want to get some earth and sky for themselves.

Night and loneliness clamor from the frozen cement,
On every stone a street-face painted black.
Night and loneliness knew each other —
Homeless shadows embrace



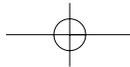
MENKE

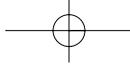
Like wanderers parted long ago,
Fall like a stone on a stone
On each other,
And clang
A hunger dance on stubborn earth —

Rows of corpses dance
Like turned-up loneliness of abandoned ruins,
Demand
With graveyard limbs:
B—r—e—a—d!

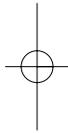
Not brothers dancing
But gloomy banners
Death himself has unfurled
From cold, skinny strips,
And swayed them here
Like a prayer for freezing streets,
Huddling as in a fiery fist,
Roaring with voices of cars and humans:
S—a—v—e—u—s!

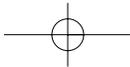
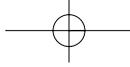
Over the city,
The moon watches like an uncoiled snake,
And it seems: soon,
Of it all only a distant voice will remain
To wail at the sunset,
And it seems: soon
Stones will seethe — and streets will rush.

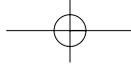




IV





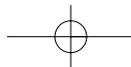


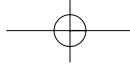
THREE SISTERS

At Night

The blackness of my eye-sockets
Scares the dazzling lamps.
Tall and wild, I stride
With extinguished limbs over the roofs.

My blood on their walls —
Crooked, red strings.
My traces:
A red-stained knife,
Hours, bent with heavy sorrow
On their cold locks.





MENKE

* *
*

I left sun and man,
Numbering my days
Among mice in damp holes.
Every mouse is good like my mama —
And tells me with her nimble tail
When I am dead, when alive.

Poor little mice
Play all night the game of death,
Of withered carrots
And crumbs of cabbage.
Poor little mice
Risk their great lives,
And I protect them from all evil
And carry toward each little mouse
My shadow as a mice banner.

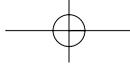


THREE SISTERS

I elected myself King
Of all the mice,
I lead them in armies
Through narrow, scary caves —
My dirty shirt is for them,
A ready-made blanket cover,
And my wide, down-at-heel shoes
Are sometimes a home.

I left sun and man,
Numbering my days
Among mice in damp holes.
My skin is worn out
From the dark lairs,
But I am beautiful in the dazzling, living velvet,
And I roar
Like the prettiest sister in painful copulation:
Paragoolt! Paragoolt! P—a—r—a—g—o—o—l—t!

So many little mice, little mice, little mice,
We remained in this world.



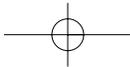
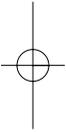
MENKE

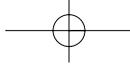
Blind Mice

Holes peer from the wall
Like the eyes of a corpse.
Blind mice prod
Over the roofs,
And dream
Like you and me
Of sun and fresh bread.

Every eye
Is graying with its rust
Like an old screw in the wall,
And cats with loaded teeth
Stand ready for the hunt
In every yard.

Evening walks
Like a fiery rider over roofs,
And every window pane is a gold-green worm.
They are graying in their holes
Like dust on old graves.





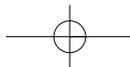
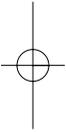
THREE SISTERS

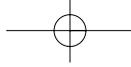
* *
*

My gaze can perceive only V's.
I am caught in a ViVid brain
Like an insane fly in a spiderweb —
Millennia are stringing on frayed threads,
All tomorrows have long ago past.

With needles, I unraveled my brain,
With the golden light of past days —
I ignited my bones.
I walk over myself
As through a labyrinth of burning doors.

Everything around us
Exudes the sickly smoke of madness.
Blank and mute,
I sway in the rust of years
As in a corner of a house — a lonely spider.



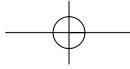


MENKE

To my Blond Child

The golden gloom of autumn
Looks like you, my blond child.
Maybe the wind scattered for you
So many leaves running wild.
But you have so much time to gather the dead leaves,
The golden gloom of autumn is goodbye
Won't remain without you, my blond child.
For me, it is too late to die.

A moment like a knife
Carried you through my body.
My blood wallows in you
Like the sorrow of burning twilights.
You're rich with dog's blood,
Homeless streets and hungry days.
You're a girl, pensive
And wonderful like my poems.
Under the restless skin of your nails,
The night of first coupling fevers.
On a little heap of earth — enough for a flowerpot,
Your full three years drew
Such a beautiful, bleeding V —
How can death not love you,
O, blond autumn child,
If on your raven path
Many a crow is jolly
And your brightest days
Are blind with nights.

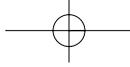


THREE SISTERS

And if you enjoy it
On your raven pat,
Sing my song like this:

If a man won't trade weary weeks
For meager pay,
On the bum's hands the callous traces of work
Will be blank.
If he spins thread from dawn's scarlet,
Each dawn will be a scarlet crown.
If his young head turns gray
From stars' rays and the rust of time,
If they're blonding, O blond child,
Even blonder than the sun on a thorn,
Then he scatters, worse than a dog,
His raggy years.

And when good Death comes,
It seems — a pensive angel rides
And waves, just so, his black banner.



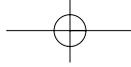
MENKE

An oak forest
Gave birth to me at midnight.
I am a dark oak — strong and awesome.
Like an oak forest, I would
Ignite at midnight,
Or bind myself
And carry me like an ox to the slaughterhouse.

One day, I will part from myself,
Show myself for the last time in the mirror,
And face the world with my own carcass.

Of eternity, I assembled here
Just twenty-five springs,
And every spring walked
As through flower-bedecked coffins.
So what remains of me now
If not all the sunsets?
Right away I would have traded
My spring head for a pot of little worms.
Right away, from every dress
Of the three sisters — my prettiest poems,
I would have plaited the prettiest rope
And hung myself somewhere in an attic:

I shall fool myself someday
Among empty ruins and demons' panes
And turn like a key in a broken lock.
Among empty ruins and demons' panes
I shall myself be a living knife.
Someday, I shall rob my own throat.

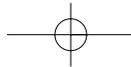
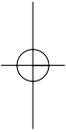


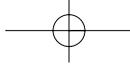
THREE SISTERS

The Three Sisters after my Death

In my children's dream I shall walk
In sandy shrouds — lunar and distant,
And watch their mothers — my prettiest poems
Made heavy by other guys.

Their sheer nightgowns
Rolled up over gleaming loins,
Each one on her drunken bed
Will know me in another guy,
And swinging on new generations —
The dark will show me its tongue.
A rustle — the screeching of a shining being,
Will remind them of a word of mine,
The wind will show me dancing on the window panes,
An empty place will show
I once was.

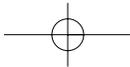


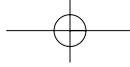


MENKE

The closed door will hear
Me, the nightwalker, walk around,
And like on an old guitar bim-bom-boom,
Every sister will rise above me
As a bare moon over a sleepwalker.
And I — a wormy bone,
Will hide in the hollow of old attics
To meet their green figures:

One will carry toward me an unborn infant,
One will sing my prettiest songs,
And the prettiest will carve of my skull
The prettiest goblet.
And each one will think her lunar thought
That I am perhaps
Some lost roads
Bending like live beings — mad and invented,
And like a moon, each one will hear
How somewhere in a roaring slaughterhouse
The last night falls on the knife.

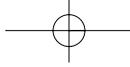


*THREE SISTERS*

***When the Three Sisters
will be Old Women***

I shall be dead — long dead,
And I shall appear — dust and time.
I shall dress them in heavy, flowering hands
To gather gray days like alms.
Gray days will come like gravediggers,
Paint blue, veinous venous branches
On brown and blond.
And through skin and bone, they will remember
Gray days like gravediggers,
And through skin and bone they will yearn
And plod like creeping owls
To my long-forgotten grave.

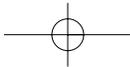
Like a stubborn, half-slaughtered chicken,
One sister will long resist her end.
Like a stubborn, half-slaughtered chicken,
Erect and proud,
She will stop at a gloomy wall
And hang me alive on my dead picture,
With a wiped-out head leaning on a strong elbow.
And she will imagine
That I sit waiting only for her,
And she will imagine
That I shall soon walk down from the picture
And awesome and wild —
Leap to the door.

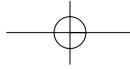


MENKE

One sister will stand facing the past — like a mirror,
And long comb her withered hair.
At night, naked and yearning,
She will sprawl in the inert bed,
Dreaming of passion and of me.
But groping blindly in the distant past,
She'll be ashamed of her sagging breasts,
And madly suck her old nipples.

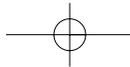
And the third sister,
With an autumn body
Fitting a narrow coffin,
Will quietly float
Out of a corner of her sleep
Like a lunar wife —
Give herself to me, the nightwalker.
Above us — a painful hail of stars,
Like death-crumbs of sheep devoured-alive.

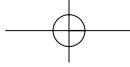




THREE SISTERS

In the red sunset of their dresses
Recalling my last sunset,
The three sisters — my prettiest poems
Will stand night after night at my grave,
Bent over their own bodies,
Falling gray like the silence, and hear
My going through eternity.
And for them I shall rise nearby —
A distant, scary rustle,
And for them I shall rise nearby —
A limb of each one's limbs,
And fall asunder,
Like flowers scattered in the wind.
Dead and young,
I shall hope for fulfillment,
Like flowers scattered in the wind.



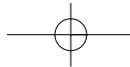


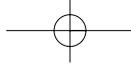
MENKE

The Three Sisters after their Death

A mangy dog will sacrifice it all
And gnaw somewhere limb after limb.
Clouds will leave their lairs unprotected
And walk with dead, demon's steps over roofs.
As if of the three sisters — my prettiest poems —
Only a demons' wailing remained.

Through frost and wind,
Like howling nights, they will dash:
One will devour the tiny head of an old crow,
One will recite the confession to a falling star,
And one will split a painted pane in three.

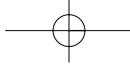


*THREE SISTERS*

Healthy children will dream in sated cradles,
That they are fighting their way
Out of a spiderweb,
Like sick flies.
In the Kremlin,
Fear itself will open eyes of fear,
Lenin will wake from his marinated sleep —
Scatter his stuffed heart and forehead,
And like the prettiest sunset — disappear.

I am dead, long dead,
And dead are the three sisters — my prettiest poems.
I am nights, abandoned in a graveyard dead's hut,
I am — nights spent with three sisters,
And gray in midnight
Like the rust of an abandoned house.

Above me:
Bones of bodyless graves
Assembled by themselves,
Constructing themselves,
And dead, bodyless girls,
Each roars in a sandy voice
That I must love only her.
And I — a chimerical wonder,
I wind like a worm,
Plowing narrow, winding avenues —
And rise, a blind cross
Above narrow, winding avenues.

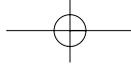


MENKE

And we all are shadows rising
Like walls of the dead,
Dissolving
In nowhere,
Leaving behind
Not a single bud.

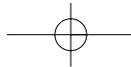
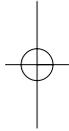
In moonlit nights, in a backyard,
Once upon a time, a nightwalker like me
Will see among the ruins of a house
The dead sisters — my prettiest poems
Fall on old, twisted beds
And rise again,
As from ruined courtly carriages.

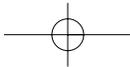
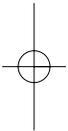
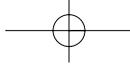
In moonlit nights, in a backyard,
Once upon a time, a nightwalker like me
Will hear, blank and long —
The silence of the sisters in their graves,
So languidly remembering
That I shall come no more.

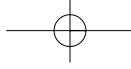


Dawning Man

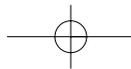
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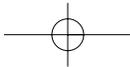
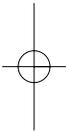
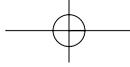


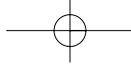




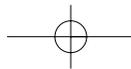
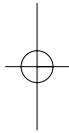
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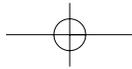
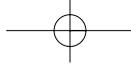


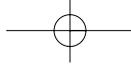




The Unemployed







Watches

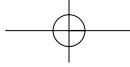
1

From tiny castors, wheels, and screws,
From wheels, gyrating to new summers,
The hands rise, and fall, and cruise,
Taking the sun through all twelve numbers.

Number One bears night on a finger,
Twelve holds the day in the middle, of all hours —
On the hands, time grows ever younger,
Waning yesterdays become tomorrow's flowers.

O thin little watches of the finest steel
And big clocks of heavy brass —
How many minutes does a last hour feel?
In a death house, how many tears amass?

They answer only with tick-tocks and tick-tocks,
Yesterday rusts on the executioner's axe.



MENKE

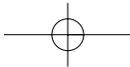
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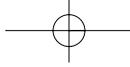
In old age, the watches cough,
Scrunch the pensive brass, still going,
They lie in sheaths as in a coffin —
They wheels whisper to themselves: d—y—i—n—g.

The grinding teeth grow mute.
Their heart is rust, the marrow is rust,
Their dust spreads gray flowers en route.
The master's hands — life's secrets in their thrust.

Tiny diamonds shimmering like eyes.
The watch's hands, they circle world's rings —
Over them, no God who flies —
But agile screws and now the master's fingers.

And aging watches in newborn modes
Sow springtime years on all the roads.





DAWNING MAN

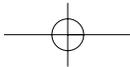
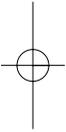
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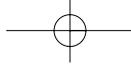
Living limbs — wheels, castors, all the props —
In the master's eyes they all are brothers.
Scattered in the lonely workshops —
Each moving finger is a father.

In his watches, ticks the master's heart,
Through the wheels, the sun goes around,
With lucid steps as on a harp —
I polished every sound.

I hold the watches softly to my ear
And listen to the stories wheels can tell:
In one minute, every generation's gloom and fear —
But future storms can heal the time so well.

Toward tomorrow, the second hands rush on.
We glow. So glows the night before the Dawn.





MENKE

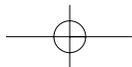
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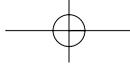
In blind houses, with a creeping pace,
The watches' heartbeats are dying on the way.
Weary hands on every watch's face
Shuffle the world onto its brightest day.

Rusty springs trudge on to push the time,
Screws tremble like loose teeth, all interwoven.
The choking wind without reason or rhyme
Screams in empty pots in a freezing oven.

Watches die, pining for their masters —
Poverty puts the pendulums to sleep.
Shadows circle — old watches, bastards,
The silence carries pain millennia deep.

The West goes out in flames — it's gone amok.
The sun comes from the East — a brand new clock.





DAWNING MAN

City and Frost

1

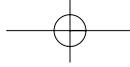
Dusk

Steel glows like smithies up on high,
The firewind dazzles like a forge —
Towers cannot reach their own peaks,
Sun erects barricades — lightning walls.

The city sings a story: once upon a time
On Broadway, deer were leaping, bold.
O city, your heart is a wheel, your marrow steel,
Your torso is the bricklayers' blood.

I shall frame your greatness in small poems,
Measure your height in a hot verse.
The day burns out in flames of frost,
Chimneys are nests, ready for the stars.

The homeless night of stone and gloom
Carves on your builders her own doom.



MENKE

2

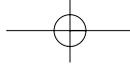
Night

A bright desert — the endless city.
The buildings are mirages of steel.
Homeless steps sow desolation,
Clothes on the bodies — ripped up bandages.

And hands that are suns and stars,
And song of cities and of fields of rye —
Lie stiff, frozen on the stones —
Blood and veins to be swept into trash.

The city has giant limbs.
Tree, man, stone — a blazing grid.
The wind rushing with death — whips of steel.
People go dancing with the frost.

Cats desolately wail in rhythm.
The homeless wake through night and frost.



DAWNING MAN

3

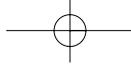
Dawn

Dawn is strong with bone and iron,
With dead bodies in its blazing rays,
Fists raised at the sun:
The night will fall, fall, f—a—l—l.

This dawn cannot burn away the anguish.
The vanquished night hides itself
In the eyes of a blind beggar,
Under horror masks of a death row.

In daytime, night dwells in ruins,
In the soft bones of a sick infant,
In a mother's mumble: "Woe is me" —
It sneaks across the borders in our blood.

Through yesterdays, today and ages gone
In restless arteries our dawn awakes.



MENKE

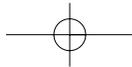
Brother Island

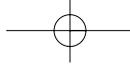
Late afternoon melts its steel bones,
Drips red on the gray East River.
Fire-breath flashing and trembling on every stone
Ignites the rigid towers in purple.

An old barge creeps with autopsied people,
Bends threefold under the heavy load,
Howls hoarsely
Through pipes gnawed by water-saws.
You see no captain.
As if she knew the way herself,
The old barge creeps
With workers gathered from stone beds.
They're lying on the deck, bodies on top of bodies
Covered with soggy rags.
On their dead hands — calluses earned on hot kettles,
In blossoming gardens, at flowers and walls.

Swaying her loose, rotten boards,
The old barge creeps
To the castaways' cemetery, Brother Island,
Grumbling angrily through the barely breathing chimney,
Weeping for the death of the homeless.
Yachts scurry past her,
Mocking her with their shimmering colors and silver masts.

Through gloomy panes, the East River sparkles
With evening, ships, the grid of bridges.
The old barge digs up watery pits.
The sun stands up to her decline, slaughtering
The long shadow of the creeping barge,
Blazing in the river as an unconquered fire.





DAWNING MAN

My Father Heershe-Dovid

1

In the Factory

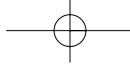
The silk factory climbs high and far
 With power, sucked from my father's limbs.
 Dawn, a prisoner, screams
 Slave songs through the chimneys.

His nights did not give birth to new dawns.
 The sweating machines knew no spring.
 Hot, stifling colors — those were his gardens.
 Factory wheels ground his days thin.

My father is gray, tall, sad as a birch tree.
 On the Sabbath, he brings the weekdays to shul.
 His hands gleam like polished brass.
 The praying permeates his limbs darkly:
 "Hard, O hard to be friends with Death, harder — of Life,
 This World is no more than
 A somber letter engraved on a tombstone.
 In the blooming of plants and people's lives, God moves —
 So it's good to fall in God's hands so weary."

In Lodi, New Jersey, cemetery gardens ripen,
 And silk turns ripe in the sweat of flesh.
 Silk rustles in the bones of strong guys,
 And the toil of children and pregnant women.

In your ears, wild runaway motors
 Sound like crazy animals roaring for prey.
 Insane as the dance of steel in the silk factory,
 Insane wine dances in orgies of loot
 On the gold and the marble of the lord's palaces



MENKE

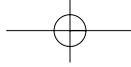
2

In the Street

At sunrise silent factories shimmer,
Heavily congealed in abandoned work.
In my father's home, hollowness rings in empty pots,
Hunger's skeletons lurk in every corner.

Streets rustle with velvet and silk.
My father remembers
Fingers sawed by the rushing silk,
Red as the stripes of sunset,
And my father imagines
Silk is red with the blood of wounds.





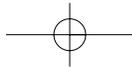
DAWNING MAN

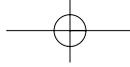
3

My Father on May Day

Facing him —
Hands from digging, chopping, turning, pushing —
Masons of cities, harbingers of storm march
Through narrow alleys, through lands of steel.
Today the streets, the bridges, the sky-ladder towers
Recognize their bosses.

Like the sun, the route of the endless march
Cuts the day into blazing roads.
Unrest, stinging under nails,
Like shrapnel in the hungry blood
The mood is bright and strong —
Seas tearing away from their shores.
My father is dark, dark, through the dazzle of banners,
His bare flesh weeping through the tatters.
He grows gray with the rust of silenced wheels.
Swinging idly, his hands
Leave traces of nails in his slim body.





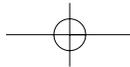
MENKE

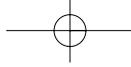
I'm a Messenger Boy

I am a messenger boy with shoulders like oak beams,
Arms strong as the ropes that pull a ship.
I would rather drag
Tied up executioners on my back,
But in my strong hands I carry sticks for the lords
And silk dresses that have weeks of toil in every fold.

In faces with double chins like fleshy zeros
The toil of tired civil servants shines.
Ladies with plush behinds
Soak the idle days in sparkling wine.

In a blossoming bed, an old princess withers,
Her chin sucking the copper-light of autumn.
On the ceiling, painted sky,
The Milky Way flows through countries and stars.
On velvet carpets embroidered bears,
Clamor toward the wild woods on the walls.
One day my hands
Will pluck up the woods with its bears,
And with fists hard as hammers,
I will pulverize the mold.
I am a messenger boy with a wife and homeless kids.
My son grows angry and strong like me:
When the enemy will burn from shore to shore,
Slashing at us in his flaming decline,
My son will charge the enemy
With a deafening fusillade
With a company of unbound heroes.





DAWNING MAN

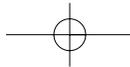
Berel the Homeless Builer

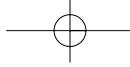
1

Smell of blazing January frost.
Above Berel
The city rises with windowed walls.
Above Berel
His toil holds the cement together
And keeps evil away from every boss.

So many hungry hours in short days,
So many homeless days in a frosty week.
In the steel forest of Wall Street
He has long forgotten the smell of coffee.

Restaurants tease him with every luxury:
“What is tastier than cherry juice?”
Whole fields sizzle on skillets.
He and the street are desolate —
Just go and lie in a garbage bin
With the dung, a sack of refuse.





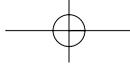
MENKE

2

Streets lament on harps of the wind.
 The hungry scream of his kids
 Still swarms in Berel's blood.
 Now they are stroking
 The philanthropic hand of the orphanage,
 And yellow Torahs above them
 Frighten them with the spirits of forefathers.
 Jehovah is hiding
 In the stars of holy flags
 Mumbling the new Shema — the US Constitution.

The crossroads still split in Berel's memory:
 A gnawing mixture of home and Eviction:
 On blank plates, as on a scale,
 Starvation weighed itself.
 A gnawing mixture of home and Eviction:
 A scared chair cuddling a table,
 An infant suckled on water,
 Children smelling of old herbs.
 Mother was carried off by poverty,
 And left her death on the walls.
 The frost is weaving cold flowers,
 The clock chatters for hours:
 Eviction, E—v—i —c—t—i—o—n.
 Through crevices as through open wounds
 The wind barks.

Young guys came, blond and bronze guys,
 Women like regular guys,
 Bearing Berel's anguish on demanding placards.
 Hosts of plain Reds came,
 With bright calls on dark street corners,
 And got into fights with creations in blue.



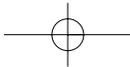
DAWNING MAN

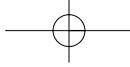
3

Joy gleams through shimmering windows.
Berel rests on a bench in the park,
Smelling of the blazing frost of January.
Like the bench
He's narrow, long and thin.

O homeless builder, freezing brother
Exchange your pain for contempt and struggle.
You will be one more voice in the raging song
That flies in a pulverizing scream,
Announcing
How tornadoes will sway
Cities and countries,
Rings will drop
From the chains — and crumble
In the rust of generations.

On the earth of jails and gallows,
Singing gardens will bloom.





MENKE

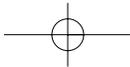
Professor Grau

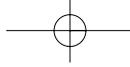
1

In the Laboratory

The restless bobolink
With the wanderlust of a hobo
Saws the cage with his hard beak
And hears
Springtime calls passing by the window,
Birds frolicking in the spring.

The restless bobolink
With the wanderlust of a hobo
Would fly with his wayfarer songs
Over Carolina, would leave
Homeless traces in strangers' nests
And wave his feathers in distant lands,
But gray professors
Who count out years
In single cells of protozoa
Love to measure
The brains of the beautiful bobolink
And for long hours observe
The protoplasm flowing
In the bird's amputated head.

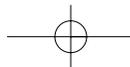
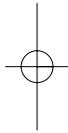
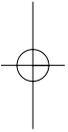


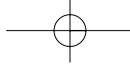


DAWNING MAN

So the bobolink sits
Stuffed with the best cotton,
His claws stretched out
Like a hunchbacked beggar.

In his drooping wings —
Hacked wanderlust of a hobo.
Professor Grau,
Bent over a microscope,
Paints in blue the nuclei
Of Bobolink's dead eyes.



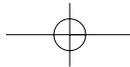


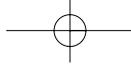
MENKE

2

Professor Grau's Friend

He created a universe of little flies
And spent his days with them like a friend —
Those with snowy skin
Boast of their white-layered race,
But those with the blackness of a crow
And a penchant for prey
He nurtured through the night.
Little flies, colorful as rainbows —
Some who fly like nightingales,
Some who climb like monkeys,
And butterflies flirting like women,
And a butterfly closed in solitude.
Were Professor Grau to picture
A butterfly struggling in the mouth of a spider,
He would understand
How rage dissects the darkness of the mind.



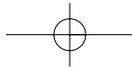


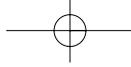
DAWNING MAN

3

Nevermore

In the laboratory, microbes
Gnaw on the dawn.
Microscopes watch cells making love.
Professor Grau, like Poe's Raven,
Mumbles "nevermore," the only word
He has left of his noble verdict.
Had the dark word choked him
Like a rope around his neck,
He would have dismantled his own body
Like the Bobolink's,
Sat down stuffed in the laboratory,
And with his death, shamed
America's glory.





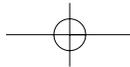
MENKE

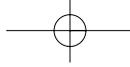
4

Professor Grau at the Seashore

In the west, the last scarlet wall is falling.
The night has made a bed for herself in the sea.
Professor Grau walks with suicide steps.
His condemned shadow shimmers silver in the water.
He is too strong to struggle with misery:
Man and forest and climbing cities —
He sees them at the seashore strewn in pebbles.
Professor Grau ponders and the depths listen:
“I and the stars and extinguished ages
Are yellow zeroes in worm-eaten leaves.
The most distant lands become nearby seas,
The most beautiful trees, death room cleansing boards.
Woe to he who is late to his death.
Sick flowers pluck out their own blooms
And smell of the rips of raw cuts,
But God is imprisoned in eternity.
Alas, alas, He will be late for his death.”

The sea found the man.
His days in the abyss
Were extinguished sparks.
Not he —
But the hand of gold drowned him.





DAWNING MAN

5

Professor Grau's Little Flies

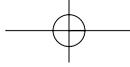
His lonely home
Strewn with garbage
Fed the little flies as always.
Then the spiders heard their buzzing.

A whole world
Was amassed in the spiderweb,
But one fly as an evil wonder
Remained in my song.

Alone for long moments
The sick little fly recovered
And weeping, told space
Of her yearning:

“My age carves wrinkles,
I gave my youth to the fear of spiders.
Sad to live alone,
Sad to die alone.”

Bored, the fly polished
Her beautiful legs,
Thought awhile of eternity —
“Come on! Let's play,” she said to the air.



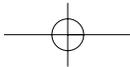
MENKE

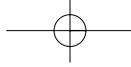
On the electrical sun,
She preserved every grain of dust
And bred from it
Heaps of little flies.

Their mother raised them
In the thinnest tremor,
And the children soared from the professor's floor
To the ceiling.

With a singing scream
They soared toward the sun
And revealed a flying forest
On the windowpanes.

— — — — —
Once upon a time there was a man
Who heard the heart of a little worm
And saw the soul of a microbe,
But did not hear the roar of the world's collapse —
Did not see the morning light.





DAWNING MAN

Sol the Violin Artist

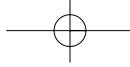
And when Sol delivered to the hand of his enemies
All the gold of his springtimes,
He was left with the dust of theater walls,
The promised life on the talking screen.

Sol knows how hard it is to walk past windows
And inhale the smells of a fresh cake
When streets are rain-covered beds
And garbage barrels are pathetic tables.

And as he cannot flee from hunger,
And as he carries into his lair the frost under his skin,
He must sell the violin that is like his own hand.
Then Sol sits like a stone in the stony market,
Plays his homelessness for street dogs like the wind.

The old market screams
With smoke-covered peddlers, screeching trains,
Still-alive chickens at the nearby butcher's.
Above him, the Williamsburg Bridge rumbles —
Full trucks on its steel neck.

When with trembling fingers
Sol traded in his violin for soup,
For a long time after, he still played his violin,
Plucking his hairs like throbbing blossoms.

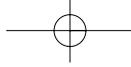


MENKE

When homeless nights
Covered steel firmament with stars,
Sol learned from straight-talkers
Why on Wall Street the sun towers into gold
And on Hester Street spits out its gall.

When homeless nights
Covered steel firmament with stars,
Sol learned from straight-talkers
That the enemy took away his luck and his violin,
That a brick plus a brick becomes a wall of power,
That one day the rage of millennia will come roaring.





DAWNING MAN

Little Hanna

1

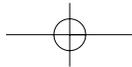
The young summer inscribed its beauty
On forest, village, muscular city —
So many days for everyone,
Days with space, with sun, with wind.

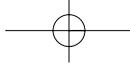
Goiters took away the whole summer
And left for Little Hanna
Skimpy rays on night walls
And left for Little Hanna
Venous twigs on her skinny hands.

Factories forgot the song of hands,
And misery like a crow
Has long perched over Little Hanna.
In her thin guts, hunger slices like a knife.

Somewhere the soil gushes with wine.
Orchards burst with fullness.
Diligent bees smell of flowers and honey.
The fulsome summer swells the granaries
And sunny plenty gilds the ceilings.

Here, the young summer sparkles misery
With the sun of ruined houses,
And like a yellow fuse,
Autumn strides through spring days.

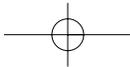
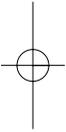


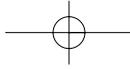


MENKE

The city screams with restless living steel.
Little Hanna turns dark in her dead joy.
Every fold of her worn out dress
Hides the evening.
In the west, sunset made a painting of her wounds.

Long have the days sliced with hunger-blades
Into the homeless weeks,
And when Little Hanna in her madness
Broke her fingernails on stones,
She had to sell in the marketplace
The whiteness of her body,
Her blonde head and the brown eyes.



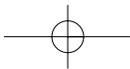
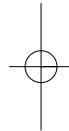


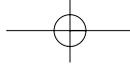
DAWNING MAN

2

Evening.
Little Hanna sees
The wise sun like a suicide
Go down into the grave by herself,
And she — a wanton bride —
Gives herself to the night.

Little Hanna's night: A blind barren woman
Dreams of light and pregnant mothers.
Fruitless passions
Celebrate doglike revels inside her.





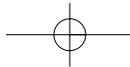
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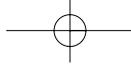
3

When Little Hanna comes back from the brothel,
Withered and weary as from a factory,
She seeks her children among the stars
And mimics her weeping laughter in the mirror.
She feels good
When the mad night is still young
And she is alone, a—l—o—n—e.

When Little Hanna comes back from the brothel,
Withered and weary as from a factory,
She sticks out her tongue to solitude,
Counts every stain on the walls
And withers into sleep
Like a shriveled rose in a glass.
And someone's words keep caressing her:
"Not you
But he who sucks gold from bone and blood
Is the prostitute."

The first crumbs of day
Mix with heaps of dust.
A loaf of bread recalls Little Hanna and the brothel.
In the sad corner on a bench
Grandmother picks lice out of an old jacket.
Like grandmother, the world is sick.
The dawn glows on a gray windowpane.



*DAWNING MAN*

Such a Holdupnik

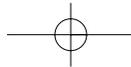
In yellow parks a restless wind
Sweeps the summer like a shriveled leaf.
Clouds run out like barrels of ink.
Boring trees do not dull their chatter:
O come again Autumn.
Come again Autumn.

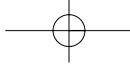
For some, winter comes like a good grandfather
With tales of snow,
With lemon tea at a cozy hearth,
With bright blizzards — a dream choir.
For some, winter comes as a monster spider,
Holding the days in cold, sticky claws.

The trees like homeless people — tatters on tatters,
Cold greetings from the coming winter.
Rains pluck the heavy garments
And rinse the exhausted man with slippery hands.
He smells of wet twisted leaves.

Burst clouds storm the park.
Starvation clutches with tooth and nail,
And when it cannot satisfy itself,
It marches to the first restaurant
With strong strides like a raging giant,
Shaking his fists:

“Hey, you, hey, worm-eaten fatso,
Gimme a bowl of soup” —
Boom! Faster than the words,
Death flew through living shrapnel.





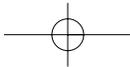
MENKE

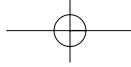
When the man rained down a warm puddle of blood,
In a dream he parted from his wife and children,
He moved through his last thoughts
As through a cemetery and saw
A freezing room where winter lives
And blue children at painted windowpanes,
Blowing their rattling breath into their hands.

Dying veins tick in the temples,
Back and forth — back and forth:
Save us, s—a—v—e.
Late, too late. L—a—t—e.

On blood-soaked plush in the rich restaurant,
The raging giant lies,
With a dead fist like a broken spear
And a hand on his bullet-riddled heart.

Outside, the storm poured fire and brimstone.



*DAWNING MAN*

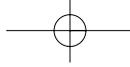
Watchmakers

They prowl around at factory doors,
With fingers stiff as clock hands —
Hollow hands cannot adorn like gold —
So who will give a copper penny for them?

Diamond shops speak
With the splendor of rainbow windows,
The walls boasting of diamond innards:
“You can buy the sun and the sky here.”
But the master is more beautiful than all the suns,
His brains sparkle in the little watches.
He healed and fostered every limb
Not a single speck of dust may disturb.
Every tiny stone — his own cell,
Every tiny screw — his own song.

The masters, strangers to their own spun gold,
Carry the poverty of backyards
On shoulders bent like bows;
They look like watches gone mute,
Rusty tweezers and screws.

The splendor of rainbow windows:
Life of brass and gold and simple iron,
Song of looms, anchors and pendulums.
The master, pensive as a watch,
Looks out of drums and attic wheels.
His magnifying glass
Changes tiny screws into giant ones.
Hours turn on the worktable.
The master gives power to the taut springs.



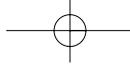
MENKE

Blind matter begins to dawn —
And tiny wheels spinning
Hasten to escape with the seconds.
The little wheels go in poverty
Through the long walk of life,
And the clock faces over them
Show with restless fingers
The miracle of creation at the master's hands.

Joyous clocks move
With windy steps on rich walls,
And tell of sweatshops and blow
The weary brains of the master's hands.

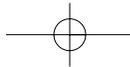
Clocks, shriveling in crumpled tin,
Squeak old in damp cellars,
Their insides sooty and blind.
Poverty creeps on their hands.
Clocks, shriveling in crumpled tin,
Bark at dawn like hoarse dogs,
Tear out of a sound sleep
Eyes red with hunger and pinpricks.

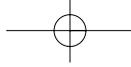
And clocks ticking on death row,
Counting the minutes of the dreadful night,
Shine with the figures
Of all the Leckerts, Saccos, and Vanzettis
With raised heads and shining fists.
Clocks ticking on death row,
Carry in their teeth the death of the martyrs —
The rage of the world on thin clock hands.



DAWNING MAN

O unemployed masters,
When diamond walls rise from your toil
In sparkling stores,
When spungold streams of your blood
Flow for the top hat dogs,
You with the rust of unemployed hands,
Kept outside with the wind,
Who now will not pluck at time
With the drive of Revolution
So the world will swirl in a blizzard
Like an unscrewed watch with cracked anchors?
Swing up, swing up,
O hands of gold and cast iron
With fist and song against the foe!
The book of Time,
Turns a new leaf.
Today grows distant,
And all distances close.





MENKE

A Child

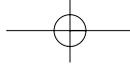
His mother hanged herself in poverty.
Night will soon dawn on the cold rope.
A dream caught the child in his sleep
And carried milk over the oceans.

The child wakes up in amazement —
Not in fear, not with hungry cries.
Snow sheep sparkle on the windowpanes,
Mother, as in play, swings so beautifully.

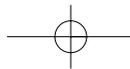
Up and down, up and down, as on a swing,
He rocks his mother up and down —
Mother's hands like an angel's wings,
The noose — such a lovely braid!

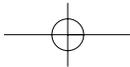
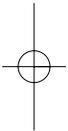
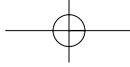
O child, you will grow
Through storms like a hero
And hang the sun on new axles.

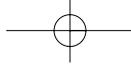




From my Alley







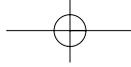
DAWNING MAN

My alley is old and blind.
Like white grass between rocks,
Heaps of children grow.
Gangster streetcorners are humming
With beggars and robbers. Few ask why
The brightest dawns are black here.

In filthy hovels
Poverty shimmers on nimble knives.
Wayward creatures wed
In ruins and in rotting barrels.

Long nights expire
In stories of city robbers,
An extinguished face looks cold and gray
Out of every windowpane.

My alley is old and blind,
And the days shrivel in eternal spasm.
But the wind plays a flute song
Of the sun — and the brightest struggles.



MENKE

Spring

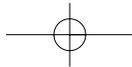
Spring walks through cellars and gray buildings,
Through heaps of dirt in dry flowerpots,
Unfurls the heart of worm and flower,
Kisses the moldy walls with breezes.

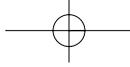
Springtime arrives here with autumn yellow.
Dust flickers gold in sad crockery on shelves.
Mold burgeons like green flowers.
A hungry day is longer than a year of plenty.

Past the windows
Brazen girls with rustic braids singing
Of villages dissolved in the old dusk,
Turn every leaf of poverty:
“Was I born of a stone
Or did a mother bear me?”

A wind painted on my calendar
Splatters the sea in the song of waves —
Near blue birds and low sky
Dawn bursts open like a bud:
The day's eyes are veiled with a film,
Calluses peeling off idle hands
And stones nudging with homeless gloom.

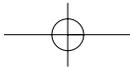
The drum dancers and the rag pickers
Trade a spring hour for half a cent.
On restless beds women are pregnant
With new men as with sunrise.

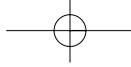




DAWNING MAN

Spring wallows in the ruins —
With sun and trash, children play,
Radiant under their dirty clothes,
Rustling like brooks with bright chatter.
Children play red pioneers,
“War!” — and victorious warriors,
They dig trenches with spades and picks.
Girls quiet as doves
Bustle with the toil of worrying mothers
And heal the wounded with paper bandages.
After all the victories and all the battles
Children play blacksmith and carpenter
And make stones of sand and mud
And build cities in vacant lots.





MENKE

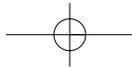
April

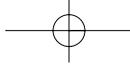
1

Morning flames through all my limbs.
The sun rolls like a fire wheel.
How can I curb so much courage,
If rotten trunks crumble like the spring?
How can I curb so much courage?
Spring towers over the city,
Morning flames through all my limbs.
The sun rolls like a fire wheel.

2

Let us dawn ourselves.
You who sit in the alley with grandmother night,
You who watch your child chase a sunbeam
Now watch your boss choking the dawn.
O let us grow ourselves into the day!
The boss brought us a fading spring.
O let us dawn ourselves.
Do not sit in the alley with grandmother night!





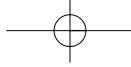
DAWNING MAN

3

Instead of April, September came —
Spring erupts from restless skin.
Instead of April, September came.
The boss steals the gold from the sun
So the good spring comes in blood
And blows wind and flame through poverty.
Instead of April, September came —
Spring erupts from restless skin.

4

In my gray room May Day roars
Like forest, like brooks, like mountain streams.
My body is light, my step trips on lightning.
In my gray room May Day roars
If spring is old, my fist is young —
Bits of sun bloom like gunpowder seeds.
In my gray room May Day roars
Like forest, like brooks, like mountain springs.



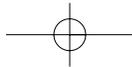
MENKE

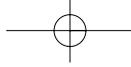
Me and You

You meet me, my girl,
Not like a pale poet
Yearning for his beloved
In a gray room,
Playing with the sadness of her footsteps,
Not like a pale poet
Who hears her whisper in a thin curtain rustling
And grows dark himself in evening windowpanes.

You meet me
When you flutter on red squares
Like the most beautiful banner in the wind,
You meet me
When my alley dons
Rags and stars.

The factory day dies like a memorial candle —
Me and you and evening.
A beggar girl with a begging fiddle
Plays her destiny in backyards.
The fingers weep thin and worn,
And every string asks
Why the nearby bread is so far.
Her song is sad and beautiful
Like flowers on early graves.
She blooms out of her scrawny limbs.
In a corner
A hurt cat licks its whipped fur.
The sun shines old and yellow,
Rummages about in misplaced garbage.



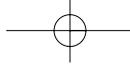
*DAWNING MAN*

I and you and half the night
Are woven in a wreath.
The buildings blank out
A hundred years of mute speech.
A world peeps out of the sheath
Of forgotten days.
Across, in a lonely cellar a man
With praying hands — two mute fives.

A candle flickers like a blinking eye.
A child dreams of princes and nymphs.
The alley narrows with grief.
You and I are dazzling:

It's good to tell you now
About a house
Where a drop of sun is bleeding on the walls
And the ceiling can embrace the floor.
I am the child of such a house.
There, poverty is steeped in sleep
And weaves the "white curse" of the poorhouse.
Boredom stretches spiderweb hands
Over old people in the prayer house,
Frightening them with Otherworld and Kabbala.

I am the child of such a house.
Now all distances travel through me,
And in every distance I see you
And red cavalymen in a flying gallop —
Each with a shadow of an enemy's fresh shot head.



MENKE

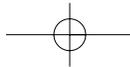
Yoske

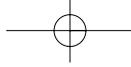
Yoske is still far from the battle,
As far as the sun from my alley.
Overburdened time will shatter
And set fire to my alley.

Stones will whirl in a blizzard
Of guys in a courageous throng.
Yoske will still be one of them —
I have not yet sung his song.

Yoske with his simple pedigree
Of the synagogue yard poorhouse
And a hurdy-gurdy
Lamenting the world of hoboos,
And Maria,
With a parrot who knows everybody's fate,
Perform their first conjugal night
In the festive ruin
And put their loving bodies to sleep in sacks.

One evening,
When the parrot's cage gaped empty
And Yoske waits in vain for Maria,
He knows who stole his joy.
Old Mike, with coffee and sweet talk,
Lured Maria into his brothel.
He sees Mike smiling,
With lumps of pimping years in every wrinkle,
Measuring with dirty fingers
The full breasts of blond Maria.



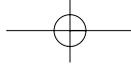
*DAWNING MAN*

When night sweeps stains of sun from the ruin,
Yoske yearns
For the rustic Maria with flaxen braids
And sinks into weeping
Like a cricket in the boards of old walls.

Where should Yoske escape his grief
Except in drunken nights in bars,
When the emptiness of his room assails him
And squats alive on his head.
The hours grow like Maria, blond and quiet.
A rustle recalls her knock at the door.
The wind whispers secrets to her lonely dress.

And since he drank away the hurdy-gurdy,
He walks bent and forlorn
And dreams of Maria and his crying hurdy-gurdy.
Yoske is content
That parks are waiting at night
Like blind mothers with outstretched arms.
Yoske is content
That Maria comes in his dream
And rocks him in her arms.

Once
When old Mike
Disappeared with Maria's life
And left her dead
On the stairs of his brothel,
Yoske
Like a bag of wounds crouched
By the dead Maria
And recited Kaddish to the gray stairs
And kissed her dead braids.



MENKE

Sylvia

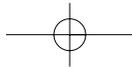
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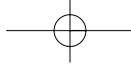
Dawn

In Sylvia's yard on sooty walls
Dawn climbs with towering steps
And throws golden buds on canvases of dust
And glows night's image with hands of dawn.

Sylvia is still a child.
Worry has erased
The radiance of her twelve springs.
She faces poverty devouring and blind.
Through the windows a crust of dawn
Melts the strong darkness in pink
And pieces of brick glint green and red and scarlet.

Sylvia is still a child.
In the sad corners of the backyard
She would now
Dig little gardens with a piece of glass
And play away her hunger with sand and pebbles —
Now, when the good dawn
Gives a handful of sun to the blind windowpanes.
But as if her mother bore her to serve the rich,
She must tend to a pampered little dog
And smile sweetly
To a genteel old woman, whose mind is slipping.





2

Sylvia in Palaces

Liveried doormen like stuffed mummies
With the pride of false uniforms
Bow their stiff heads to the bosses.
Sylvia is greeted by dusty backdoors.

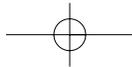
The expanses in palaces roar.
With mincing steps on polished floors
The old woman rattles her bracelets.

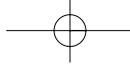
The bracelets laugh their spungold laughter,
And as in wild abysses
Divers swim in every pearl —
All around her the wind of nimble servants.
All around her the protection of marble walls.

Sylvia in the palace sees
The little dog in paradise light
Play with diamond apples.
Sylvia talks as in a dream:
“O madam, good madam,
I would like to be the little dog.”

Motionless calm dissolved,
As if the old woman jumped up from a fever:
“Not me but my little dog hired you,
You dummy, Get out, get out!”

Sylvia feared the street,
In her thin fingers a trembling nickel swayed.
Tram-tram the tram rattled:
Past Sylvia's eyes
A thousand villages in every street,
A thousand huts in every building.
The wind through steel is a bass.
The sun, rival of the night, is a fiery ace.





MENKE

Children Begging

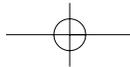
They stretch thin hands like empty spoons —
Children
With milky skin on narrow bones,
Children
With black stars and white teeth.

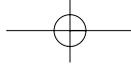
Nuns, lust hidden by veils,
Kneel submissively:
May God bless the children
With meager bread, with yellowed prayers
And cold pennies from good people.

In the freezing houses
The wind goes in a rattling dance
With loose window panes, chasing
Naked poverty through damp cracks.
Children scatter on lawless streetcorners.

Simple guys like oaks
Flourish like forests in the street.
Fists as sharp as stones,
Green with hatred, eyes meet.

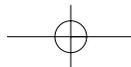
Streets whelm with rage,
Every hour is full:
Blood — the banner of all races,
The most beautiful.

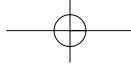




DAWNING MAN

Children on abandoned stones
Like flowers in withered rims —
How many will wither no one knows.
Everyone knows that on dawning roads
Children will recall beggar's bread
And line up the hangmen in rows.
Everyone knows
The children will make all the countries
One brotherland.





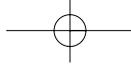
MENKE

Zushe in the Worker Poet's Smithy

Like a blacksmith
I shall learn to forge my poems.
Let my poem be strong
As the touch of white glowing iron,
Let my poem be simple
As the swing of toiling arms.
I shall collect my words like naked sparks
And glow them white —
And rush them in the storms.

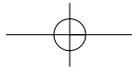
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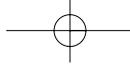
When all that was left
Of Zushe, the happy young carpenter
Was a head with homeless nights in the brain
And arms on weary shoulders
Like tongs on abandoned work benches,
He let go of the reins of desolate life.
He lay there —
A board not fully sawed
And holds his fingers like freezing nails,
And crunches cold darkness with dancing teeth.

*DAWNING MAN*

2

I take the loneliness of freezing Zushe
Into the hot smithy of the worker poet
And forge the frost into fiery hatred:
Verses fuse under the band of my hammer,
Words sparkle on the searing anvil,
Hot is the steel of glowing poems,
Lines bend — white-hot stabs,
And words stand up like red frontline soldiers.
I take the loneliness of freezing Zushe
Into the heated smithy of the worker poet,
I forge the frost into flaming hatred,
And every word is loaded with shot,
Every letter stands naked in the fire —
The poems — raging Bolsheviks,
And rigorous words know:
When we need, we are blacksmiths.
When we need, we are spears.





MENKE

3

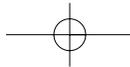
Song of the Former Menke Katz

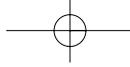
Behind the cover of a mourning mirror
He sings his dark song:
“Do not blow me out like a penny candle,
Blow me out like a sunset.

“Caught in spiderweb,
I say a confession for my poems.
Outside, poverty walks on naked blades
And God dies of eternal loneliness.
Through waste paths and dirty beds,
Bent hoboos, lice-ridden brothers
Carry my beauty.

“Courtyards envelope themselves
In white linen as in shrouds.
Ancient walls stand as if trussed
And try to scatter their bricks.
A man shrivels at a dirty barrel,
Stars wallow
In the holes of a bedbugged bed.

“Autumn tears tree-lapels in mourning.
I walk the crooked walks of back alleys.
Above me
A sleepwalker calls the moon.
Climbing on bridges through the steel of madness
In yellow parks he sees
On naked trees, my mornings — plucked leaves.





DAWNING MAN

“I take my ‘Three Sisters’
To black lairs and empty rooms,
To wild swamps —
They go through me as through secret pits,
They go through me as through death row.

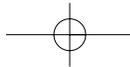
“The second sister sings:
‘The years will forever carry life like this,
The skies will never move from their place,
Birds will forever fly like this,
Flowers will wither and new ones will bloom.

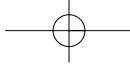
“The earth will roll on blind hoops
Like a wheel of time through graves and stars,
Lions will forever roar in the woods,
Seas will flow away, new ones will come.’

“And the first sister sings:
‘God illuminated for me
A sky in love with a desolate field,
And He disappeared
On the weeping fiddle of the world.

“ ‘God fashioned me
From the first falling snow
So I hover as snow over the bright world.
Silver snow falls from my untouched body.

“ ‘When the spring takes my endwinter away
I will hide my gray hair
In the first falling snow.
None will think of finding me
In the first snow.’





MENKE

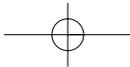
“And the third sister sings:
‘The day grows blind and stooped.
Should I lead him
From street to street
To beg for alms at strange doors?’

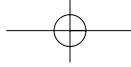
“I shall vanish from it all and from myself.
Before the blind day, as before, my beloved
I shall appear
In blond braids and black dresses,
And long whisper secrets
To his shut eyes.

“ ‘My fingers gray
From grief and gloom.
From sadness and autumn
I become all gold.

“ ‘O you, with the charm of a bright hobo,
Who destined me
To shuffle like a dead moon in the night?
Who destined me
To turn gray like dust on old walls in the night?’

“And the wayward poet answers:
‘Our enemy destined it.
Our enemy, an eagle with sick wings
Shuffles along on my floor,
At his every move, I weave a rope for him.
I with lightning and storm
Accompany his every step
And laugh into the eagle’s eye.

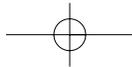


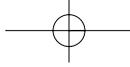


DAWNING MAN

In the corner, at my table
The sick eagle kneels.
My little table, a king on crutches,
Turns his wooden back to the windows.' ”

— — — — —
O yesterday's Menke Katz,
If you died of sadness,
Now I place you in a black-bordered frame
And purify myself
In the fires of my awakened race.





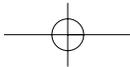
MENKE

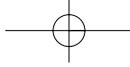
4

Behind me, I see
In a mouse hole, the coward
Envelops “three” blond “sisters” in spiderweb
And chisels words into crescent sickles —
While Zushe the fine carpenter apprentice
Engraves every limb in the stones of the streets.
Behind me, I see
In the mouse hole, the coward
Lures my hungry brother
With false nuts of orchards made of stars.

I caught myself in ruins,
I nourished sorrow in imagined cradles
And wept on poison paper
Over the mad buzzing of stuck flies.

Now that I am hopeful and bright
With the tumult of battles,
They follow behind me darkly:
The lonely walls, the shadowy flowers,
The lazy blood of caressed agony.
We shall march through the dark,
Storm in our steps, fire in our hands.
We shall write the most beautiful poem
With fire on gallows and prison walls.





DAWNING MAN

Girl

1

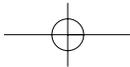
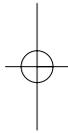
In Expectation

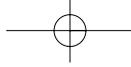
The staircase turns in a round dance,
The faucets cough in a choir.
A snow circle whirls on the windowpanes,
A dance of trains flies over the roofs.

You walk through ancient alleys
With a clear heart and a clean dress.
You rustle with the song of the raging square,
With the dazzling, flaming words.

The snow drops white flowers on your head,
Walks on tiptoe, barely felt
Surrenders itself to your step without touching.
Your light will adorn the ruin.

Every snowflake opens up — a white rose,
And the wintry house blossoms with spring.





MENKE

2

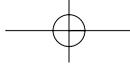
In the House

In the house, the knife-sharp frost
Builds a throne for himself on the windowpanes.
Need is heavy with generations of rust,
Need over the world is a warning flag.

The silence hears the storms coming,
The heart hurries to the festive May.
Ready battles hush under the skin,
And victory flashes on wings of lead.

And if barricades will separate us
And paint the fork of our roads with blood,
There is so much beauty in dying —
Beauty enough for both.

Our life has found eternity.
Our death will ignite new suns.



DAWNING MAN

3

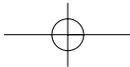
You and Poverty

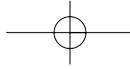
Poverty burns in the frost like a wound,
A candle rocks the cold shadows to sleep.
Through heavy night, through sooty walls
You, my girl, are the brightest light.

Need prowls over us like a snake.
The wind dances on naked swords.
Through the broken ceiling under the old roof,
Snow melts in rivulets.

Your breath is hot, your waist lithe,
The frost paints bright roads before us.
Nimble moments with a song
Bring the morrow to greet us.

Today you smell of frost and cherries,
Tomorrow we stride in raging marches.





MENKE

4

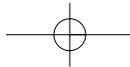
Marches

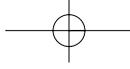
The day claps madly with sick wings —
Yesterday aligns generation after generation.
In the roar, all generations fall
Like bricks from a burning building.

In the din of footsteps — a march of days
Choked in the narrow alleys.
In the roar of footsteps — a chase of winds,
A distant march to the nearby Tomorrow.

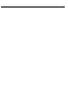
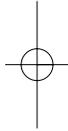
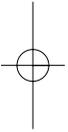
In us there is so much wildfire.
From flames, we forge the brightest walls —
Days wait with the might of volcanoes.

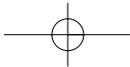
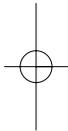
Not by the milky starlight —
Through blood, through caresses of fire-hands
Shall we declare our love.

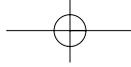




Summer's End





*DAWNING MAN*

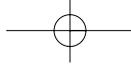
Berrypickers

Summer's end will not yield to enemy Autumn.
It holds the strong sun high as a banner.
Days go through the unfolding of leaves.
Newborn chicks sing of a thousand moments of life
And jump naked under the mother chicken.
Meanwhile it's good to borrow a feather.
Ducklings duck in the dust and scream:
Duck-duck, d—u—c—k,
One more hour, one more hour —
Autumn is here:
Duck-duck, d—u—c—k.

Autumnal forests die in bronze blood.
Berries look old, yellow flowers bloom young —
Every flower a nest for big yellow butterflies.
Berries like lovers are submissive and good.

The evil thorns scratch the fingers —
Blood of hands and blood of berries intermingle.
The girl's fingers are nimbler than the minutes:
Pluck and pluck,
Pluck-pluck-pluck —
A wine-like rain pours from the berries.

On the rough bodies
The beauty of the field blossomed,
The smell of berry bushes
On windy faces, on bared thighs.

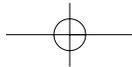


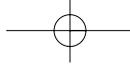
MENKE

Sun and wind and graceful berrypickers,
They bartered the weary day
For sweet berries in wicker baskets.
What remains of their toil: bloody flowers
On pricked limbs, and very thin slices of bread.

At night, after the meager dinner
They fall on hard straw sacks.
In their dream, berries open up like wounds.
The aftertaste of hearty borsht is good,
The last hours of rest are better.

The field bursts with ripeness, with rustling power —
So many berries on each thin twig,
Every berry, a doll filled with sun,
Spurts black drops of dew.
As if the wind gathers berries too,
It plucks handfuls with windy fingers,
And the earth is crunchy and tasty with sap.





DAWNING MAN

Labor

For Noah, my little boy

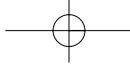
Hear how the saws speak,
The builder understands their tongue.
People break roads in the height —
Chisels scream, Crack and Rack.

People forge
Living hands from iron.
Steel teeth
Grasp whole walls.

Sparks dance —
Hammers clasp like hands.
Irons with naked flesh in the fire
Do not burn down.

The blacksmith smites and smites
And grips the steel with hot tongs.
When mute steel melts in song,
I take its glow into my poem.

My poem — a blacksmith,
My poem — a hammer:
I forge words into bare fire,
I burn all locks —
Let the full barn be open for all.



MENKE

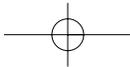
In a Factory of Mourning Clothes

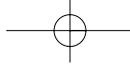
For my mother Badonna

Nimble girls rustle
With fingers, needles, and black silk —
Long mourning dresses grow
And stripes perfect for mourning mothers
Who grew sons for battlefields.
Black, embroidered flowers grow
And open all your senses with the smell of murder.

Through long workdays, bitter bread ripens.
Philanthropic ladies visit
With steps swishing like fresh dollars,
Luring into mourning clothes.
Angry machines rage against all double chins.
Soldiers in brave pictures march on the factory walls
Through red white and blue,
Waving their condemned arms.

At the mourning dress, Mother thinks
Shrapnel bursts in tears,
As if it understands her calamity.
She hears
The shrapnel wailing through her son:
I don't want to pierce your skin!



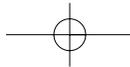


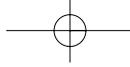
DAWNING MAN

Mother in her mourning dress sees
Her son enveloped in a horrifying fire —
He displays his lopped off arms
With fingers like crabs on frying pans,
Secretly mumbling something to her.
A red rivulet runs from his head,
The wind whispers through his hair: sleep, sleep,
And cradles his last pain in the star shine
And carries his ashes to every blossom in a flowerbed.

Dusk.
Factory girls
Wear the sadness of the mourning clothes.
Old mothers, bent as over graves,
And the ladies —
Holy church ladies,
Pious synagogue ladies —
With words as if for tombstone inscriptions
Kiss strange sons in black frames.

Evening shows the gold sucked from heads.





MENKE

1

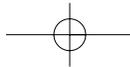
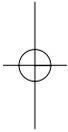
Autumn Clothes

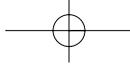
Needle go, needle hurry, needle fly —
Creation demands the unborn dress.
In the pulsing veins, the bright toil
Is like a sun over the unborn dress.

Needle goes, needle hurries, needle flies —
Silk swishes as if donned by dancing women.
Half minutes catch full minutes,
Dresses grow through dews of sweat.

Thread is wind, thread sings, thread dawns.
Life rustles in the thinnest seams.
Nimble needle darts through bodies of silk,
Dresses dazzle like autumn dreams.

Dress after dress rushing in full splendor,
To bring someone stolen joy.





DAWNING MAN

2

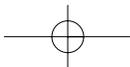
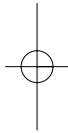
Autumn in the Shop

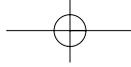
Shuddering silence in steel dawn.
Soon the shop will roar for loot.
The shop is old with smoke and blood and dust,
With grayed stains of white grief.

The shriveled girl at the sewing machine
Cut up her sun with a pair of scissors —
Like late autumn, withering flowers,
Frozen blossoms on her childish face.

She harkens to flies buzzing in spiderwebs:
“You cannot find your springs anymore,
You cannot look for them among flowers.
Go look for them among spiders in ceiling corners.”

The day dies in her weary blood.
Above her, the sun is a golden whip.





MENKE

3

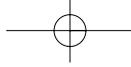
Autumn on Rich Boulevards

The sun warms herself at a cauldron
And drips her blood, sad and beautiful.
The flowers give away their beauty.
The wind entrusts his weeping to the flowerbeds.

The wool of autumn dresses trembles,
As if tied to the sheep in slaughterhouses.
Delicate seams caress waists:
Needle steps shimmer like wounds.

Autumn recalls creased weeks,
Withering girls — weary prettiness,
Heavy shoulders, rough fingers,
Pricked by needle tips.

Embroidered sadness gnaws on dresses,
Indian summer dozes off on double chins.



DAWNING MAN

4

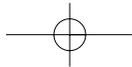
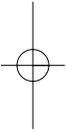
Autumn in Palaces

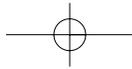
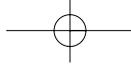
Storms play a death song to autumn.
Forests dance in a circle with the wind.
But days walk in scarlet here
And paint the church in the park purple.

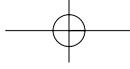
Joy has never set here with sunset.
Wine lures upon golden trays.
Maria sings in the park, buds burst,
God mows down the sinful with His scythe.

Autumn swings the olive groves to a lullaby.
Hands like palms bless pious ladies.
Evening sinks in autumn clothes.
The sun spreads warning flames.

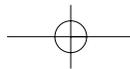
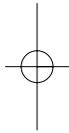
Far away — Jesus crucifies a thousand generations:
Black crosses share their secrets with the Torahs.

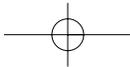
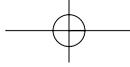


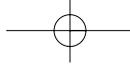




Plackards







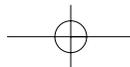
DAWNING MAN

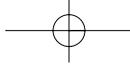
At the Brink

We condemned those generations.
Now they teeter at slippery abysses
And fall, with gallows and with crowns,
Into the fires of revolt.

A callused hand, a living spade
Shoves aside the past
As through an evening mirror.

The earth, full of brown rye,
Grows
Through the birth pangs of wounded years.





MENKE

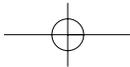
Martyrs

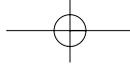
Steps
Of martyrs:
Morning song
Facing the cold flash of the butcher's knife —
Prison walls cannot ensnare them.

Heads
Hung on poles
Frighten the butcher with flaming silence.
Every head
Washes the creases of time with blood.

Steps
Of martyrs remain
Like winds in flames,
And hatred remains
Deeper than all chasms.
Their deaths burn with the unrest of victory,
Their deaths
Are

Steps
To
The
Sun.

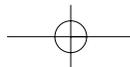


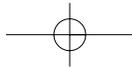
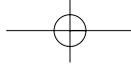


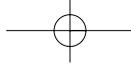
DAWNING MAN

Bullet

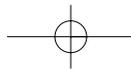
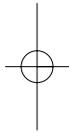
The hero of death cells strides.
In the foe's rifle the bullet thinks:
Alas, I cannot devour myself,
I am myself a moment of fire.
The hero of death cells strides,
The bullet screams to him:
I shall flare joyfully inside your foe,
Inside your foe, the my burning is beautiful.

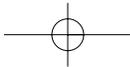
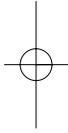
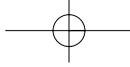


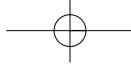




June Nights





*DAWNING MAN*

In the Orchard

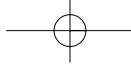
The orchard is drunk on too much sap.
In neat lines the earth is parted.
The work is scarlet on every flowerbed,
Red roses flicker.
Through every rose — the rosy wind
Sings summer.

The orchard is blind on too much shimmer.
Roads glimmer like rainbows.
June nights turn into double chins.
And the orchard hears no other laughter
But that of old ladies and trained dogs.

To the empty group
Where all becomes colorful boredom,
They bring a boy to entertain them —
Squinting eyes, torn clothes.

In mid orchard
A river leaps with bird's steps,
Each step a magic wheel
Of light and space and dazzling joy.

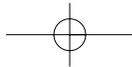
Sated trees bend with tasty shadows
Of gooseberries and pears.
For a penny, the boy is a diver,
For a nickel — a shrieking dog.

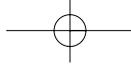


MENKE

Pennies fall like little angels in a dream —
Swift, agile, the boy catches them. TR
The pennies scrub in a sack of sand:
Splash —
And the boy reached the bottom
With a penny in his bleeding mouth.
The gentlemen laugh with their bellies: Ho-ho-ho,
The ladies giggle with their snouts: Tee-hee.

The boy would have swum on and on.
The good people
Were willing to throw a lot more pennies.
But the boy went down gracefully
And didn't come back.
Restless circles
Rippled the surface of the disturbed river
And trembled so long like water harps.
The orchard sang with wind and birds.



*DAWNING MAN*

In a Death Cell

The prison grinds its teeth of locks.
Someone imagines hands,
Lowers his weary eyelashes.
He walks with eyes shut,
Wants to see his beloved with his fingers.
Her beauty rises before him —
Blond, dark, brown.

Another one imagines he is not yet born,
The world for him is an open coffin.
He hears a terrifying song
Of a dancing trap with trapped mice.
He walks through words as through caves,
Talks with the buzzing of flies:
“All fires expire in quiet smoke,
And perhaps I was hung once upon a time:
I am a corpse, escaped from death,
I am the crying voice of the wind.
I am tired of my long death.
A rope is waiting to hang me again.

Silence slithers like a serpent
And hears:
Someone wrings his slim hands,
Another one hones a knife on his superfluous neck.
The June night twists her starry mouth
And glues together the crumbs of sleep
In their eyes.

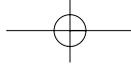
MENKE

And the third one,
With heavy limbs on a hard bench,
Writhes in a ball,
Touches his own breath,
Remembers he's alive:
He walks through himself as through bright grief,
And the first one hears his song:

“The enemy still revels in his power over us.
Our meager bread is still bitter with blood.
What black force, what death
Could make us abandon the battlefield?

“What bayonet will curb our truth?
Of yesterdays, yesteryears, millions of days,
We gather the flames
That will blow up the foe of every generation.
Neither prison nor death
Shackle our flaming march:
With warm blood like with living ink
We write your sentence on the gallows-filled earth.”

In the cage, the bars
Pierce the moon with rusty spears.



DAWNING MAN

A Little Fish

For my little girl Troim

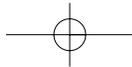
O pretty fish with fairy eyes,
Do not seek the sea
In the muddy water of a bowl.
If the little bowl
Is a sinking world,
No one will save you from sinking.

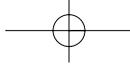
The fisherman tore off one wing
When he pulled you in his net,
The second wing you bit yourself —
Maybe you could have flown away?

The sick fish
Sucked out of its body
All the drops of water,
Now she slaps
The sharp shores of the bowl,
Scrapes her own scales.

Pretty fish with fairy eyes,
The knife on the table
Whispers secrets to the empty pot.
What remains is your anguish
In the narrow bowl.

Like me, you were born of a mother.
I am still a tiny girl.
If I had been bigger,
I would have cheated the knife
And carried you to the deepest sea.





MENKE

How Many Questions is an Answer?

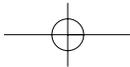
What is older than time?
What is younger than young?
Grief is older than time.
Dawn is younger than young.

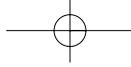
What is closer than today?
Who is farther than the farthest far?
The enemy is closer than today.
Yesterday is farther than far.

What is bitterer than want?
How much wages for a pair of hands?
Hatred is bitterer than want.
The whole world — for a pair of hands.

How much blindness in the eyes of a blind man?
How many sparks in the brightest fire?
As much blindness as the eyes of a blind man,
So many sparks as the brightest fire.

How many miles were the steps to the revolution
All around the walls of a dungeon?
So many miles, ships didn't travel,
Roads couldn't count.



*DAWNING MAN*

The Last Poet

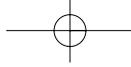
As in a dream,
The last poet
Of loving nights and thatched huts,
Where the moon silvered her sorrow
On the windows for him,
The last poet
Still roams the big city.

As in a dream,
The last poet still roams
Through steel nights,
And like a willow with stripped branches,
Like a cemetery, he beholds
Endless towers rising.

Like sunset in the old world,
The last poet languishes
In the debris of the old world
And the grief of condemned judges.
Beside him
Smoke of sirens meanders,
Dreams of yearning shtetls hover.

Seven days of mourning
Like old crows
Attack the wounds of lost time.
Of all the wounds, he is the most beautiful.
His beauty shines from yellowed poems,
From the light of grief at a corpse's head.

The last poet remains
Like a dull axe in the dust of yesterdays.
Poems, conflagrations of dawn,
Crumble the rusty dreams of the last poet.



MENKE

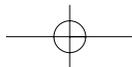
Tomorrow

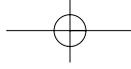
Days will wait, restless and open,
Like doors yearning for welcome guests,
Poverty will sleep in the horror of books,
Move her remains in the crumbling leaves.

People will build streets in the sky,
Find in the mind the most distant God.
Our flag will be the color of all races,
Our flag will be eternal dawn.

And if I part from you,
O human, before you are born,
Take my greetings from your nearest stars,
Hear in my songs the talk of yesterday.

The world still wobbles at Death's precipice.
Man stretches out his hand of Tomorrow.

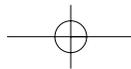
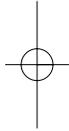


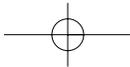
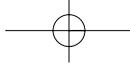


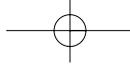
Burning Village

Book I

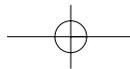
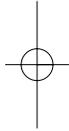
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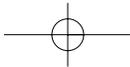
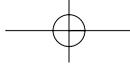


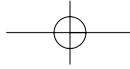




Yeiske





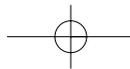


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

In Michaleshik, a spasm of silence.
The huts huddle in danger.
The town gluts itself on calm
As on a last supper —
Calm screams the coming of blizzards.

Night lies in pieces, sawed by crickets.
Virgins cower in attics,
Shuffle the spiderweb with scared steps.
All around —
The Viliya with gushing water
Peels the bark off fresh-chopped trees.

The ferry raft is moored, the guard has gone.
The midnight study vigil is restless
Over the nearby graveyard they hear
The wind saying Kaddish through the grass.



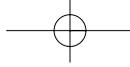
MENKE

Pig Street lit up with early spring,
Twigs grew blue with lilac blooms.
Michaleshik holds its breath
And listens —
Suspect breezes whispering:
They go! They come! Who? Where?
The Germans, huh? The Germans what?
Sha-sha,
Hush!

In the studyhouse, in starry loneliness —
The light of torn holy books.
The tabby cat, dozing on the fence,
Wakes with a start,
Claws ready to pounce on Death.

From somewhere, a rider
Gallops by through the fear;
One hand reins in the nimble horse,
The other — loads lead.

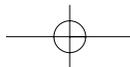
Bent over his obedient horse,
Vigilant to bursting, the rider sneaks by:
He is all — ear, he is all — eye.

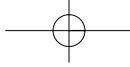


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

Time
Condemned the town to death.
One day of fire consumed the sleep of generations.
The garland of huts — crumbled in slivers.
In the church, crucified Jesus burned.
Wringing hands gleamed facing the fires:
“Save us, Sa—ve—us!
Our God has forgotten the church.”
Horses whinnied in flaming stables.

In ash of Torah Scrolls,
Jehovah — a sitting ember.





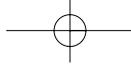
MENKE

Cannons hurled the dawn up to the sky.
Mountains rolled down to valleys.
On the earth, displaced roofs point:
Here was a street.

Mud puddles streaked with blood, point:
Here were people.
Sooty window shards recall:
The sun was seen through them.

In lairs of the Forest of Zabortsh,
Children and mothers and stars in hiding.
Death grazes on fat wolves —
If someone screams to the wilderness
He will be taken care of by the wolves.

But somewhere, a single hut, saved by a miracle —
And Dveirka dreams there in Eltshik's lap.
Louder than cannons, they listen to the softest murmur:
“Our oath is sacred,
Till death shall we love.”

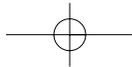
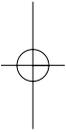


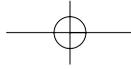
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

At the earthworks of a cannon trench,
Aaron-Velvel's Chashka is giving birth.
All the huts fled
And left her alone with all that destruction —
Smells of corpses sown in the wind.
— — — — —

Q — u — i — e — t.
Can she still hope for day?
Night is eternal
And the world — as if someone took it away.
She bites her voices into her own flesh —
No one must hear her lament.

The child remained — for wounded light
The mother — for grass and for stars.



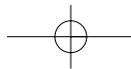
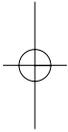


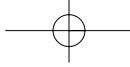
MENKE

At dawn after the battle, people found
Michaleshik — ground through a fire mill.
Of man and house — blood and smoke remained.
And Meishke the Crook sits shiva for them all —
Just he and Pig Street, shielded by the Finger of God.

At dawn after the battle, Badonna found
Her dead sister's arms — clutching a baby boy.
As if she wouldn't let the sorceress, the sun,
Tempt her child into such a world.

Badonna brought her sister to the grave,
And to her children, she brought a new baby brother.

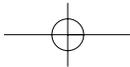


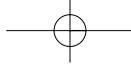


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

When even Death grew weary
In the cannon fencing,
Bleeding rye rustled in Koomsa Field —
Flickering ashes glowed
Like a rainbow after a storm.
When even Death grew weary
In the cannon fencing,
For three days and three nights, the Germans
Marched through the demolished town
With rifles, songs and Russian prisoners.

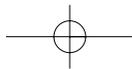
And Jews —
For three days and three nights they thought:
Like Jacob's found son
The boy shall be called: Joseph.
And women babbled like water,
Each one heard a rumor:
The boy is a reincarnation fled from hell.

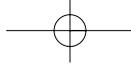




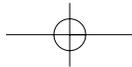
MENKE

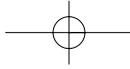
For two lunatic years, the war
Spun the town in bloody spiderweb.
Man and horse and crow in a whirlpool —
The Viliya flooded and swallowed.



*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I*

Yeisefke in his cradle
Dreams a loaf of bread as big as Svir Hill.
Joyfully, he throws off the blanket
And turns his tiny back around.
Dusk envelops him,
Strokes his body to the pink fingertips.
Crumbs of light duck into the windowpanes.
The old hut grew younger in scarlet.
Suddenly he rips off the heavy silence:
“Mama, bread-bread-bread.”
Badonna gathers up the pious pages,
Soaks the yellowed prayerbook with tears:
“*Yeisinke*, my child,
To be awake is silver, to sleep is gold.
Death now loves the screams of children.”
But *Yeiske* — a rattle gone wild.
Menke shows him an angel tossing pennies.
In vain do all the children try:
Boo-boo-boo, shu-shu-shu, hush-sh-sh.



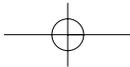


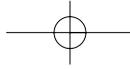
MENKE

The last spark of dusk went out.
Eltshik tells
Of a palace — locked under the sea;
The angel of death chose in the depths
A dying queen — for his bride.

Bloomka holds the palace in her eyes.
She looks through windows of the purest sea.
She is afraid of walls built of living fish
And the Leviathan — dressed up
In the diamond braids of the princess.

At the whitewashed oven, Berke in terror
As if the cold would soon devour him.
Tall and thin and green, Berke
Plods like a pendulum back and forth,
With white holes hollowed in his jacket.





BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

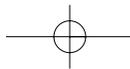
Badonna croons a lullaby:
“*Yeisinke* my child,
Sleep my treasure,
The wind blows wild.

“I found a boy,
The sky in his eye,
His hair spun of flax.
Bye-bye.

“So I am now
Your new mama dear,
A new father
Will someday appear.

“Your new father
Is over the sea,
May good luck
For our baby be.

“O sick cow,
Give us healthy cheese;
O wasted garden,
Give us carrots and beets.”



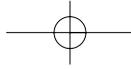
MENKE

“*Yeiskele*, Steiskele,
Child so clever,
With what do they fill
The world jug ever?”
“With Bud-Bud-Bud.”

“No, no, little boy of mine,
Not Bud-Bud-Bud —
Say Blood! Blood! Blood!”
“Bud-Bud-Blood!”
“Fine, fine, little boy of mine.”

“How does a goat baa?”
“Boom! Boom! Boom!”
“How does a fly zoom?”
“Boom! Boom! Boom!”

“How does a birdie sing?”
“Twit! Twit! Twit!”
“How does a bagel ring?”
“A lot! A lot! A lot!”

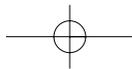


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

And the women have forgotten
To twiddle their thumbs with boredom
And count on porches
How many girls remained spinsters.

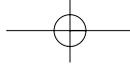
And the woods have forgotten
The vow of lovers in evening strolls.
The sullied women's bath hardly recalls
How pure brides were led into magic waters.

Now soldiers choose their brides
With naked swords in hand,
And if someone hurls a curse —
The rifle is ready with cold fire.



MENKE

In Badonna's hut
Dusty plates and cold pots turn gray.
The Sabbath candles wallow in oblivion.
Menke asks:
Can you make kiddush on straw bread?
Will the war spare Jehovah?
Will a moon remain — to rise for its blessing?
The children laugh like lizards.
Eltshik profanes the Friday evening —
A burning brand frames in sooty light
The bare table, the crooked walls.
Yeiske prattles,
His tongue swollen from the prickly bread:
“Mama-mama,
Bread-bread-bread, milk-milk-milk.”
“My child,
The mill won't grind my flesh into wheat;
The cow gave blood not milk today —
For in the field people snatch the fattest blade of grass,
The cow bit up her own dry tail in hunger.
O God, take back this desolate life.”

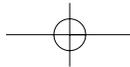
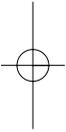


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

Midnight.
Badonna hears —
A choking scream at the neighbor's
Slicing the thick air.
Cold fencing of swords —
Someone falls, someone calls:
“Sa—ave us, sa—ave! Oy — vey!”

Across the way — at the neighbors,
A German soldier on a sex hunt
Picked out a child
And ordered — Love! Love!

Badonna prepares for battle with candlesticks and pots.
She inhales the helpless scream
And hides
Her only daughter's black braids under a gray wig:
Bloomka sits, a tiny grandmother,
Or a dog for the dogcatcher.



MENKE

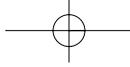
Extinguished October night —
Crying desolation of Lithuania —
Rain pours clots of clouds
Soaks the dead in the field,
And mourns over the living in the trenches.
Through scorched ruins of Vilna Street
Lost Russians drag their feet,
Death hidden in their rifles.
Man and wind and scream of rain.
Michaleshik howls — a wolf with stabbed limbs.
Dveirka hides from danger
In Eltshik's strong arms:
"My only one, my love,
Strength rises from your body,
From the light of your chestnut forelock
And you are filled with sad songs
Like your silenced mandolin."

Extinguished October night —
Crying desolation of Lithuania —
Now and then
The lightning of a bullet slices the dark.
Now and then
Crooked huts awaken
And tremble —
From their depths to their bullet-riddled roofs.

BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

Midnight.
All around, vigilant silence —
Crazy Amy lingers in the graveyard.
She brought her dead organ grinder a flower.
She tells him
How many huts were leveled with the pond —
The bathhouse motionless under watery slime
And when the new moon hangs the shrouds
On the ruined studyhouse,
Frogs bless the new moon to a godless sky,
For God wallows in tatters of the Holy Ark.
She tells him
That mud puddles stand in the place of his house:
“O Todres,
Black is my luck, like the soil of your grave.
I have grown crazy and weary,
My period is coming on.”
She strokes the hard earth:
“O Todres,
I want to be a pillow for your head.”

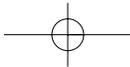
All around vigilant silence —
Crazy Amy lingers in the graveyard.
She brought her dead organ grinder a flower.
The flower freezes in her fingers,
The petals glide down to his grave.
The living dread of the graveyard — is she.

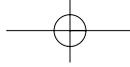


MENKE

The moon seeks a way through patched-up windowpanes.
Berke at the oven — with lime and smoke,
Looks up to God.
Badonna thinks:
Didn't evil tongues curse the Master of the Universe?
Is even God
A doctor great enough to heal the sick world?

Badonna thinks:
Death will never leave this place.
For eternity,
Head and heart will seethe in the cannon fire.
For eternity,
Hunger, seared into your flesh,
Will gnaw your fainting bones.





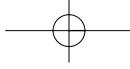
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

“Mama-mama-mama,
How many waters in the Viliya River?”
“*Yeisinke*, my child,
Waters and blood together shiver.”

“Mama-mama,
In the whole world, how much bread?”
“My child,
In the whole world, dead and dead and dead.”

“Mama-mama,
How many Russians will a rifle kill?”
“My child,
For their mothers, black regards to the fill.”

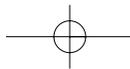
“Mama-mama-mama,
How many heads can you put in a cart?”
“*Yeisinke*, my child,
All the way to the end of earth and sea —
The pain in your heart.”

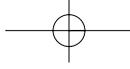


MENKE

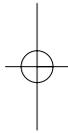
Fingernail moons show
How many angels sleep with Yeiske.
Bent over him, Badonna hopes:

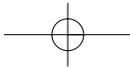
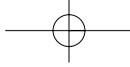
“In America, ‘your’ daddy,
Don’t be afraid —
In almonds and raisins
He’s gone to trade.”

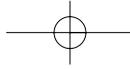




Dawn

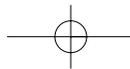


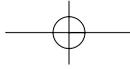




BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

Again bombs lit blackened towns.
Lost somewhere,
Deaf Michaska stands at the crater
And sees in Jesus' sky
Flying huts of magic,
With stars instead of windowpanes.
Flying everywhere — whole cities,
Making the sign of a cross over the awesome sky,
Wonderfully igniting all the distances
And raining sparkling dust down on the snow.
Hot smoke rises from the snow like magic.
Who are they, where from?
Deaf Michaska doesn't know
That airplanes are now sowing death,
That the Kaiser's robbers sent them
To change the human race into trash.



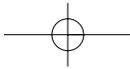


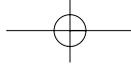
MENKE

Michaleshik still devoured by venomous calm.
Its sleep — a giant serpent,
Coiling:
Around condemned roofs,
Around charred corners.

Toys that kill wake Yeiske from sleep:
“M-mama, hear,
M-ma-ma, look.”
“Who? Where”
“A c-c-c-cockroach.”

Badonna lifts a corner of the curtain —
Her warm breath clears a strip of windowpane
And sees airplanes in wolflike hunt,
One up, one down,
And lo —
With bombs they pave
Streets of fire.



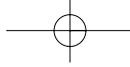
*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I*

And Badonna wanted to yell in fury:
“Hey, airplanes, hey, crazy heroes,
What fortress are you flying to conquer?
The poorhouse of mossy Pig Street,
Or the babies in frosty cradles?

“Hey, airplanes — hey, crazy heroes,
What fortress are you flying to conquer?
Amy the sleepwalker of the graveyard,
Or the three mangled soldiers
On the new Viliya Bridge?

One with a piece of head,
His helmet bloody and crumpled,
Seeks a thimbleful of strength —
To braid for himself —
From God-and-Kaiser’s-belt — a rope.
One with shot off toes
Pulls the stubborn trigger of his rifle.
And the third with dying eyes,
Prays a final prayer:
Come, good death, O come —
I shall give you my Kaiser, my God and my Fatherland.
Come, good death, O come.

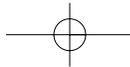
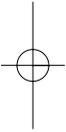
And Badonna wanted to yell in fury:
Hey, airplanes, hey, crazy heroes,
What fortress are you flying to conquer?

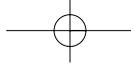


MENKE

So much darkness all round,
As if eternity strayed into the night.
Menke says —
If dawn collapsed in the bombs,
There will be no sunrise anymore.

Through the fear of the trembling hut,
The roar of a distant soldier's song.

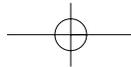


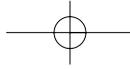
*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I*

The bomb thud flees and fades
Wrapped in the last pieces of night.
Through the shot up silence,
The cow screams for help:
Badonna moo-oo, Badonna moo-oo.

Badonna shuffles her low shoulders,
Past the cold wall to the barn:
In the entrance shed, dawn tiptoes shivering,
Ray after ray, like first steps —
And reddens the pallor of her broad cheeks.

The cow — a dream in demented brains:
On one horn —
Swaying like a starvation banner, an empty bucket.
The other —
Broken in its deep rings.
The tail like a whip hidden under the belly.
The tongue, superfluous, poking out,
Dripping nauseating foam.
A cold breath congealed in her mouth.
The white and yellow stained bones — bitten by rats.
Cross-legged, like a human's wringing hands,
She stands facing Badonna — a ghost! A ghost!





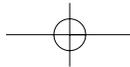
MENKE

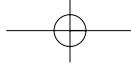
And news of the ghost spread at the poorhouse
In white sacks like shrouds
People came running —
One with an angry tongue, one with a prayer, one with a stick.

“The Prussian King”
His goiter always tearing at his Adam’s apple
Sways his tin crown,
And the little bells serve him obsequiously:
“Tinkle-tinkle, snort-snort,
I have already chased out the ghosts!”

Chaim-Meir of Svir crows and flaps,
As a tied up rooster flutters his wings:
“More than once have I ridden a ghost,
And more than one I choked in my sack.
Ghosts, like tears, multiply and multiply —
With my long beard, like a broom,
I can sweep them out.”

Yeshiye the Blinker with trachoma eyes
Blinks fearfully —
Half a Torah in his frozen arms:
“The burned parchment says:
Shisheela the witch changed the cow into a ghost —
We must drive out her ugly spirit with the excretion blessing;
When the cow strips off her skin
And remains — a naked ghost,
I’ll kill her with a broken windowpane! I’ll kill her!”

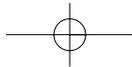




BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

Crazy Amy drove everyone away:
“I hereby unleash my waste years on you all,
You yourselves are ghosts and lepers
My Todres from his shining heaven,
Through the holy cow — sent us an angel.”

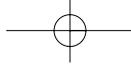
The cow totters, facing Amy,
Rump bones cutting through her hide
A bucket hanging from her horn.
Amy prays:
“Hush,
At night,
When God will write the first stars on the firmament
And the angel cow, God willing, will die,
We must wash her
With untouched snow on the purifying board
And with a tallis in a coffin,
Bury her next to my Todres, the saint.”



MENKE

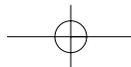
Badonna takes off the bucket as if it were sacred.
“No, sweet cow, I won’t kill you,
Like your mother and grandmother —
Outside of your gall and sick liver
What joy could you give me
And as I have no life for you,
There is no life, no life —
So die, sweet cow! Die!”

But the sweet cow didn’t obey
Either Badonna or God.
When Badonna suckled her with Sshtshav like a baby,
Her “Ghost-legs” barely stood up
And its extinguished eyes
Lit up with sparks.



BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

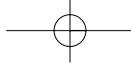
Dawn in the east — a battlefield with all its deaths, ignited.
Frost shrivels the putty on the narrow windows
And paints snowy star-roads on the glass.
Dveirka listens:
From the painted stars, Eltshik spins a shining tale —
With so much love,
Every step of her slender Eltshik rustles.
And for whom —
If not for her — does his fast heart throb.
If she were not shy,
She would have cried for joy.



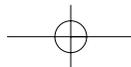
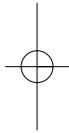
MENKE

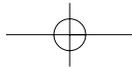
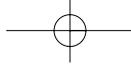
As they adorned themselves with the most beautiful words,
As they have no words anymore
To tell of their love —
Eltshik and Dveirka play the card game *Flirt*
And lose all unhappiness in their happiness:

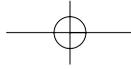
“You, my faithful, my golden joy,
What I want to confide, what I want to tell you —
My own breath should not hear:
If a bullet takes you away from me,
I shall not cry, I shall not lament,
But in my mourning dress that I will rend
Under the moon — I shall let down my long hair
And in a shadow dance
Lightly I will make my way to the Viliya.
Above me — the Michaleshik stars,
And upon my head,
The most beautiful garland — of buttercups.
Thus will I come to you in heaven
With my death — to heal your death.
Upon our graves the grasses will kiss.”



Giddyup, Here? Giddyup, There?

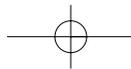




*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I*

Father looks at the children from a corner of the room.
He always smiles down through the spiderweb from his picture
And bids farewell with a wave of his hand,
Among flowers, birds, and trees
That pray with branches to the spring sky.

Badonna lifts the heavy picture from its place,
And the plaster crumbles behind it —
Pieces of frozen wall fall on the spring sky
And on Heershe-Dovid's laughing head.
How much fear in the falling sky!
How much weeping in the old dust!



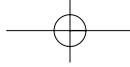
MENKE

Then the children recalled
Father is somewhere far away;
Neither the strongest eagle nor the fastest train
Can reach him.
And where is America?
Menke tells
That he saw America in delirium
When he lay sick at good Aunt Beilka's.

Berke mumbles
As if confiding to the oven
That he flew to America in a dream.
He recognized his father in a palace
And stroked the golden walls with his hand —
The dream brought him back on foot
And drowned the sea on the way.

Eltshik swears
He can count the steps to America.
He takes the children over the seas,
Riding on words of clever books.

Bloomka plucks pieces of straw from the bread
That never knew any rye.
For a while, she stares, steeped in melancholy,
And then, as in a disaster,
With a crooked little laugh — she laughs and laughs
And claps her hands till they're sore:
Faster! Faster!
To father, to the palace in America!

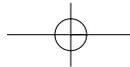


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

The children ask in a chorus:
Was Yeiske's father swallowed on the battlefield?
Did his mother die in childbirth?

“O my children,
About Yeiske's mother —
Ask the spring and a cursed night.
About his father — Elye-Leizer son of Abba,
Perhaps the crows know.
You must bury the secret deep in your bones
Until Yeiske's bar-mitzva.”

Every child,
Choking the tears in his throat,
Digs the scar deeper in his heart,
For Yeiske — their best brother is not a brother.
And clenched in his lips, each one holds his weeping,
So that clever Yeisinke
Won't understand anything of his tragic loss.

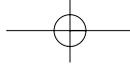


MENKE

Yeiske asks why does a dog bark —
Not th-th-thud, not b-b-b-boom,
But bau-bau-bau —
And what does a w-w-watch mean with its t-t-tick?

Badonna hits him with a finger:
“Do not stutter, stutter not,”
And whispers to herself —
Hunger devours his tongue,
For the milk in the cow has dried out
And his tongue
Was pierced like a sieve — by the evil prickly bread.
There is no life, there is no death,
My orphan, my foundling.

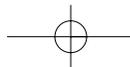
Her brain aches for Yeisinke.
She brings him many beautiful bullets —
Handfuls of grizzly toys.
Yeiske plays with the empty casings
Seeks in them the souls of dead soldiers.
Extinguished conflagration lurks in the empty casings,
And the muted thud screams over the killed people.

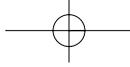


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

Yeiske —
With amazed eyes and a parchment forehead,
Turns gray in a corner — an old child,
His mind is ten times older.

Yeiske, raised in the canon's tumult
Hears the clock
Walking on crutches, heavily laden
And hoarding minute after minute like a miser:
If he were a clock,
He would rush to tomorrow, to after-tomorrow,
And quickly see all the ends.





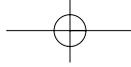
MENKE

Through the sad window,
Yeiske gazes with his three long winters;
Eltshik tells his strange stories,
With Yeiske — a sack of sadness in his lap:

Once upon a time, there was a girl of bread —
Caraway seeds sprinkled on the rye,
Arms and legs — made of bread,
But her head was made of sky.

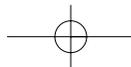
And the girl was more hero than you —
She was not afraid of ghosts and wolves,
For she was as small and thin as a sliver.
Only people did the bread-girl fear,
Lest a hungry person eat her.

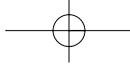
When God fed the world with darkness,
In a milk-dress with chocolate tresses,
She sat on the moon.
When dawn broke as now,
She buried herself deep in the earth —
But her head remained a piece of sky.



BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

And when the girl herself grew hungry,
At first —
She cut a chocolate tress,
Then she shaved a little finger.
Thus she emerged more and more from the earth —
Till she ate herself up.
Just her sky head
She left behind at this window.
A hand like a breeze remained waving to me
And her cry like a fiddle resounded in the Kumsa.



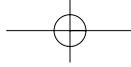


MENKE

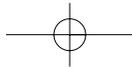
When you are as big as Menke,
And go all alone to Vilna Street,
And look up like Menke for a long time,
You will still hear
Her milk-dress pouring somewhere,
You will still see how the stars mourn her.

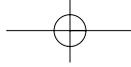
The girl will never come again.
That makes me sorry.
If I knew her grave, I would bring
The prettiest flowers for her, don't worry.

And Yeiske listened to the tale with his skin and bone
And for a long time
The invented girl cried in his eyes:
"El-el-el-Eltsh-Eltshik,
I do not cry
Because her head was made of sky,
But the girl was of bread —
Sprinkled with tasty caraway,
Her arms and legs — all of bread,
That's why I cry, I cry."

*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I*

Dawn.
A curious light searches Uncle Chaim's smithy.
The smithy: a ruined ship frozen to the ice.
The wind shakes the loose beams in the mossy walls.
Here lies the past, choked along with so many suns.
The still bellows dreams of fire.
Bent scythes yearn: for Uncle Chaim's hands,
For wheat fields and sated barns.
The dull axes remember
The forests of Gubezh and Aaron-Velvel's rafts,
And a rusty fence remembers
The saliva of the racing horse,
Foaming in his wild muzzle —
When Badonna's first suitor, Velfke —
Rode to her in a blizzard,
And by one moment missed his luck.

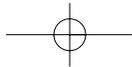
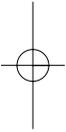


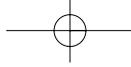


MENKE

On Pig Street,
The frost carries shrouds through the houses;
Over the empty cradles,
Dawn spins a golden death.

Menke flies in his dream — up to God,
He becomes captain of Paradise.
He holds the rudder of luck
And decrees
That Yeiske will be his own brother,
And decrees
Frost to be brother to summer —
And the cold flees.
He orders every stone to multiply
And every stone blooms with a loaf of bread.
He orders every head to find its abandoned body,
Every gallows to bloom:
And life celebrates forever.
He orders the sky to descend to the earth —
And angels carry the sky down,
And lift Pig Street to the stars.

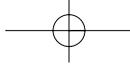


*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I*

Berke at the lukewarm oven,
Saws his own bare bones.
The cold carouses on his lips,
The soft teeth dance
As if he were sifting something through them;
Facing him
A shadow moves, a shadow of a hand with a pen —
As if his aching back
Wrote with its wounds on the hunchbacked oven.

Eltshik watches Dveirka
And holds all their love in hands of Flirt cards
Dveirka with a nail on the frosted windowpane,
Scratches a letter:
“My beautiful, my beloved — — —”
His mighty unrest flashes in her eyes.

Eltshik feels
The morning deliberately hides
Above Dveirka in the attic holes:
Here war must not rob the light.

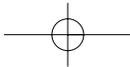


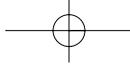
MENKE

Eltshik tells
How a bear
Selected a man for his friend.
He brings to every ear
The prayer of a pious forest
And to every eye — a gray man
Who screams from a cave: O woe!

A bear nimbly perceived the lament
And took the old man
Into his lair,
And the man did not fear the bear.

Facing the bearish eyes,
The man's hair gleamed so bright;
The old man heard the bear wailing
And wondered why its wild heart was never sad.





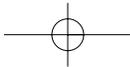
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

The old man listens —
How the bear with his lonely growl
Asks the forest
Why he was destined to be a bear,
Why a nasty fur hides his kindly face.
And, huddling, the forest replies:

“Listen, O listen,
How many winds, how many bloodthirsty robbers
Run through all my trees.”

With a compassionate cry, the bear
Asks the forest:
“How can I rise on wings over you?”

And, howling, the forest answers:
“Do not leave me, do not leave me
with so many clouds, alone.”



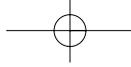
MENKE

The wise old man saw
How the bear tried to hide from his own fur;
He saw the big bear small and stooped
And scared to his murderous teeth.

The bear — a sick sheep —
Looked at the wise old man;
And covered with forest fear,
He shuffled off to sleep.

When the storm roused the bear,
He begged the lightning for a fiery death;
But the lightning refused to flash,
And the hunter spared his pellets.

And when no one gave the bear his death,
He sat thus a long time
Over his superfluous life
And forgot
That he was once a bear,
Until the old man saw:
The king bear
Become a creeping worm.

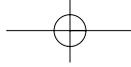


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

Suddenly the bear, a conqueror, aroused
And caught the man in his raging maw;
With his bearish teeth
He foraged for kindness in the old man's heart.

In the old forest,
The sun set — a mute, unfired bullet.
From branch to branch, pieces of beard fluttered —
And dazzled the fearful night with a gray glow.



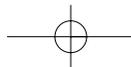


MENKE

Bloomka, fettered to a wonderful awe —
Cannot understand the tale of the bear,
She twists her lips
And leaps up in woe:

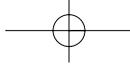
“Eltshik-Eltzuk, Yeiske-Yei—suk, Mende-Mentuz,
Berke?! Our quiet little bear?!”

“No, Bloomka, Bloomalla, Bloom.
Not Berke, not our quiet little bear —
A kindly bear of the wild forest.”



BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

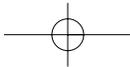
Bloomka cries
And her voice trills like a falling bird.
She licks a crust of bread
With her tongue overdosed on saccharine.
In her eyes, fear begs
The big world not to crush her —
But when she hears in the pot
The lean shtshav boiling in joy
And thinks
That the porridge of garbage and straw
Will someday grow soft —
She grows easy and mild,
Then sick joy ripens in her
And she skips and leaps
And flips her childish braid
Longer than her dress
And she squeals and sings:
“Abracadabra tra-la-la
Abracadabra tra-la-la,
A puffing peacock will come
From a distant land,
He will bring cookies and coffee,
A full-full-full-full house;
Abacadabra tra-la-la
Abracadabra tra-la-la.”

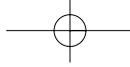


MENKE

Hushhhhh!
R-r-rat-a-t-tat!
Thud —
Unknown brothers are falling!
Marrow spilled on the snow beams with wisdom.
The day is full of charcoal fumes from smoking limbs,
Of darkness of extinguished figures.
Where would Badonna hide from such a day —
She cannot flee from today to the morrow.

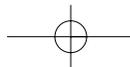
The children in a mourning wreath around Badonna:
“O children, O soon,
People with fires will dance a hell dance.
We must, we must disappear — down to the ghosts,
And which fire should we choose?
All roads lead
From fire to fire —
Through burning doors.
O my children, O woe,
If I could
I would chase you back into my womb.”





BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

Dawn shows Michaleshik
Congealed in golden blood.
Deaf Michaska bows to the idol.
Badonna senses
In the Kumsa under the snow —
The sap of her springs flows.
Yeiske — a tiny frozen sun,
Lets the hunger suck his thin limbs.
Eltshik, clenched, watches
The day dawn for the last time on Pig Street:
The thatch roofs in a prayer against the fire,
The scared chimneys — throats for the slaughter.



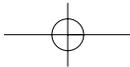


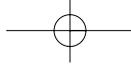
MENKE

Badonna, like the caw-caw song of a crow —
Full of tears and disaster,
Suddenly jumps up like a madwoman
And attacks
The last Torah Scroll in the yellowing studyhouse,
And, with her weak feet, tramples her strong God:
“Now, dead God,
Now — burn, now — scorch.”

Suddenly, like a madwoman
She harnesses the skeleton of a cow to the wagon
And packs her children and her rags:

“Hey, cow, hey, stupid cow,
Carry us someplace, carry us!
Giddyup, here? Giddyup, there?
Somewhere there must be light, so much light!”



*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I*

Crazy Amy — over a snowed-in grave,
Hears her Todres speak as through a hurdygurdy:
“Dear Amy, my shining heaven,
Do not say farewell to the poorhouse and graveyard,
You are destined to die in Pig Street.”

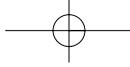
Crazy Amy — over a snowed in grave,
Hears her Todres — a weeping from the Otherworld:
“Dear Amy,
Do not leave me alone in my grave.”

So Amy took a clod of dirt from his grave,
And hit every door with the Sabbath-eve stick:
“Good people,
Let me take on your evil lot,
Let it enter my every aching limb.
May you not be afraid of rifle, hunger and battle.
My Todres will bless you all,
He will be our father,
He’ll intervene for us!
He’ll save us!”

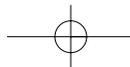
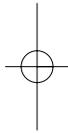
Amy, with a lament as from the Other World,
Rushed through the town:
“To flee Michaleshik
Is to buy hell.
Michaleshik is holy.
He who deserves the happiness of my Todres —
Death will reward him,
And he who is not worthy of his beloved name —
Let him get used to life as to leprosy.”

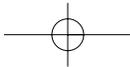
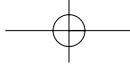
MENKE

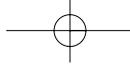
Michaleshik freezes with the slain:
Under the ice of the Viliya,
At the rotting fence of the graveyard.
Crazy Amy
Queen of the dead and of Todres's grave,
Alone through blasted fields,
Plods — an invented Golem,
And tears her garment in mourning for everyone,
Even if God cursed him to be gentile,
Three times a hundred rips
Mourn on her tattered dress.
Crazy Amy, stooped over everyone's disaster,
Laments —
Chicks devoured by frost,
Laments —
People yet to be shot.



Found the Enemy



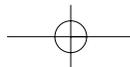




BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

Dusk is now calm on the eve of battle.
The calmness is on guard, in every heart and rifle.
Mute, the fields face their inner screams.
In every grain of sand, they hide a secret.

At the cannon, every enemy swears:
This night will swim in blood.
The Russians swear: With German heads,
We shall build a staircase to the clouds.
The Germans swear: No Russian will be left
To bring home the news of battle.

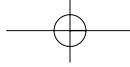


MENKE

Night sits on her rotting throne,
Sated with carcasses.
The hour of battle sounds —
The Russian opens the first cannon
And roars to his enemy:
Blood! Blood!
Howling earth flashes lightnings,
Illuminating the old human ash.
Distance wails with half-slaughtered voices.

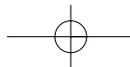
The Russians are here with all their fire,
But nowhere are there Germans —
Just red rivulets of horror
Out of two blown up guards
Fertilizing the spring.
Just two souls — from exploded bullets,
Expiring in mighty fear.

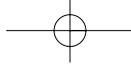
The general, with his whinnying laugh,
Neighs: Ha-Ha-Ha!
Did they flee like rats, the cowards,
The German dogs?
Hi-Hi-Ho,
Ho-Ho-Ho,
Did the first salvo put them to sleep?



BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

And the Russians launch into a gallop,
Horses fly through the carcasses' air.
The horseshoes drumming: Beat-Beat-Beat,
Raising the riders Hop-Hop-Hop.
At their side, the saber, at their head, fear.
The general, like a crow, calls for death.
The infantry marches
To the beat of drums.
They're marching for hours, for days.
Not a bird's tweet, not a rooster's crow.
The thatched huts burning like torches.



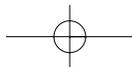


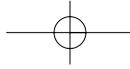
MENKE

At the infant dawn,
With a head of ash, a soldier sits —
Above him,
Deceived rifles hover.

The general grinds his doglike chin:
“O Just God, O Almighty,
Order this dead man to live! Live!
I would choke him now with my teeth.”

Everything drowned in fear.
Sometimes
Your own trumpet call scares you —
Sometimes
The weary fall of a soldier.

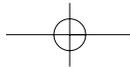
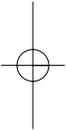


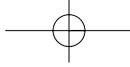


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

The enemy! The enemy! The enemy!
The general sees in the beam of the searchlight
Soldiers disguised as beggars,
Their rags shining in the evening,
Some drink the snow in the field,
Some pray to the sky,
Some talk to a damn-Jew's Torah Scroll —
And some pretend to doze.

And the general commands:
“Death to the German! Death to the enemy!
Not one limb of the disguised gang
Must remain today.”
And the infantry marches faster,
Horses' gallop rings louder,
Victory bangs her drum harder!



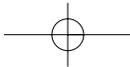


MENKE

Suddenly, the boiling earth
Resounded with gas, smoke, shrapnel.
Suddenly, the boiling earth
Swallowed the Russians, with horse and rifle.

Only the general,
Through falling human walls,
Still crawled — a corpse against the enemy.
His body burned,
Covering the snowfield with blood.

When he crawled up with all his wounds to the enemy
He found
Eltshik and Dveirka making love —
Entwined in a garland.
He found
The wandering Pig Street —
Children, mothers, old people,
Who took up the trench graves
As a living cemetery.

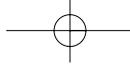


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

The general, while dying “heroically”,
Still aimed at rifles with his teeth;
But if the legs will limp no more,
He fell back
In his silver-covered uniform
To drown in his own blood.

He prayed to his medals —
And immersed in wailing,
Begging in the field:
“Czar Nicholas, Father, forgive,
I die a hero.
My death is a victorious trumpet
For your holiest banner.

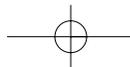
His convulsing lips
Played “God Save the Czar.”
His anguish was overwhelmed by preying birds —
The field was dark with the black clatter of wings.
And it seemed:
In his medals,
Dead soldiers applauded —
With ripped off hands,
With shot out brains.

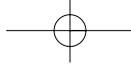


MENKE

Michaleshik, with love, with rags and tears,
Went out into the "Great Outside World."
Longing eyes carry the poorhouse with them:
From battlefield to battlefield.
The Viliya itself leaks away in bad dreams.

Every battlefield
Was once a tiny gray village.
Here, a heart burned on every stone.
Here, a crow burned at the prey —
And with burning wings fanned the fires.

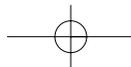


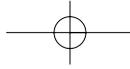


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

Now the trenches fall silent — the screams are finished —
Abandoned by victor and vanquished:
Now emptiness and hunger
And Badonna with five crumpled kids.

Berke, covered
With the hide of the dead cow
Scares all the children.
The hide, with stains like white-yellow stars,
Holds Berke —
Locked in heaven by a cursed evil spirit.





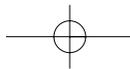
MENKE

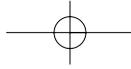
Menke hears
In Berke's voice — the cow speaking:
"Berke-Bereleh-Bear,
Doff my hide,
Let my Heaven of Cattle part with the earth."

Yeiske thinks
How good and warm Berke feels in his hide.
Bloomka,
To the deaf trench — hoarse shouting,
Bloomka,
With legs like sticks, stamping —
She's scared of Berke.

Badonna consoles them:
"O children,
You must not be afraid,
Even of the Creator.
I myself trampled Him with my feet,
And there is no heaven in the sky.
There is hell on earth,
To slaughter us and to roast us."

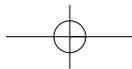
Berke laments —
Scared of himself
And hears
Like a demon's — his own crying.

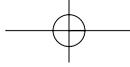




BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

When fields are plowed for battle,
Happy are death, robbers, and ravens —
How should Yeiske know
The smell of onions and bread.
He thinks
The earth was made for shooting,
And to devour people — like a hell.
He thinks
Beauty is the flash of a bullet in the guts!
More beautiful than a bird
A rifle can sing with powder and fire.
So many pretty rifles must not rust.
Not in vain
Did God tally the fields for graves.

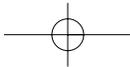
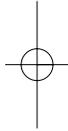


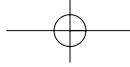


MENKE

Yeiske sees
The days travel in skeleton carriages.
From the sky, bombs are flying
And falling on the earth — thunderous missiles.

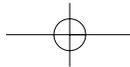
He senses
The earth sips living blood
And he feels painfully good
That someday he too
Will pull a sword from its sheath,
And, festooned with bullets,
Gallop on a flying horse.

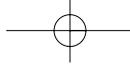


*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I*

Eltshik confides in us — roaming rumors:
People are marching to Lithuania
Against hunger, war, and the rich.
They are going through the night to seek the sun,
To sow tomorrow in yesterday,
To straighten the sky with the earth.
They march with Lenin, with songs — with fire,
To stand up against God and Czar.
They are coming to burn all poverty,
To light up all darkness.

And there will be —
A world with bread, blossoms and laughter.
Over tormented generations,
The scythe will cover
Every field with felled stalks.
And days, shining guardsmen,
Will caress us all
With hands of dew and light.



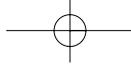


MENKE

And Eltshik tells new legends —
How night entered the sun,
Poured every ray into wine
And left of the sun a bloody drop of light.

But at dawn,
When the sick sun healed,
With all her rays she shot at the crown of corpses.
Night fell,
The sun, dressed in fire,
Walked through every dark crack,
Till all over the world —
Her love and scarlet rose.

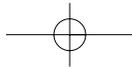


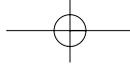
*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I*

And Eltshik tells new legends:
How the emperors carouse —
Over sons, buried alive,
And leave for mothers — only their stifled screams.

Nimble slaves run to the emperors
With platters — diamond-covered skulls.
No one counts how many miles
They leap in one day,
How many prayers of dying soldiers
Ringing in the soft gold.

One slave sees
Wounds dripping — in every goblet of wine.
Another one hears
The fall of burning cities.
A third one sees
In drunken mirrors
Souls of the fallen come in, flying
On bleeding crows' wings,
Humming from their graves:
“Hey, Slave,
Adorn with a sword every emperor's head!
Hey, Slave,
Get from under the whip — to the sun!”

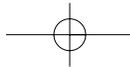
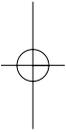


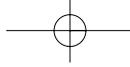


MENKE

Michaleshik is abandoned by man and world.
The Kumsa is sown
With pieces from the faces of heroes.
The air wafts
The choking of dying mouths,
Warming the frosty earth with their last breath,
Holding in their teeth, like a curse, their humanity.

Through the frosty evening, the dead soldiers shine.
The field is dark with the ashes of carcasses in the flickering light.
The evening shows: how many colors
Of robbed wines will shimmer in the ashes.
The wind shows:
Tall, gloomy grasses will rustle here
When every mother will take into her dream
Her son's vanished face.

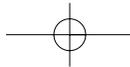
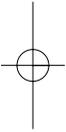




BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

At night, in the Forest of Podverantz —
When Amy shut her weary eyes a moment,
She felt
How pleasantly they sleep under the snow:
The mushrooms, berries, grasses,
And above them
The fallen, steeped in moon.
She guided her hand through their frosty locks,
And left it there, along with eternity.

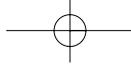
In her last moments she saw:
The good angel holds her good deeds —
The angel sent by Todres through Badonna's cow.
And she saw: the good angel
Washes her locks with moon soap,
Then turns the world —
And all evil men are choked.



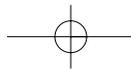
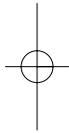
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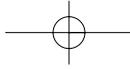
In her last moments she saw
Todres leading her somewhere,
Saying:
“My dear Amy, you see
In the sky Badonna’s cow
Chews *cholent* instead of hay.
My dear Amy,
Take the Wild Ox of paradise,
My dear Amy,
One sweet *kugel* — is the whole world.”

In her last moments she heard
Her Todres — waking her from the Otherworld:
“My dear Amy, in heaven,
Death is a black stick
With two silver heads,
And both belong to us, both.
My dear Amy,
It’s time, it’s time to die —
You’ve torn your lapel for so many dead,
You said the confession with so many living.
My dear Amy, my treasure, my gold,
Even in the Other World I love you.”
And the war
Burned bones and nerves,
And the ashes of people were called
Victory!



Heershe-Leib Tarshish





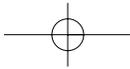
MENKE

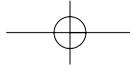
And you are rich, my small town Svintsyan —
Rich with fire, your blazing earth,
Rich
With darkness, your anguished sky.

I saw your heart on every spear.
Midnight in conflagration I thought:
In Hell
There was a sunset.

So you're rich, my town Svintsyan,
O rich with blood as your twilight with gold.
Rich
My rag town Svintsyan.

How many abysses in your fear?
How much doubt — in the dying light?





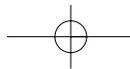
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

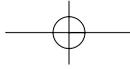
That you are big, my little town Svintsyan —
Is shown by two synagogues and three bath-houses,
Is shown
By ten alleys and so-many courtyards.

That you are big, the carters brag about it,
Waving their swishing whips:
Your roofs
Cannot be reached with pokers.

But what measure will take the size of your desolation,
At night, in the hollow of suicide attics —
When with white
Hair of fear, boys and girls hang themselves.

O earth — where can you be gloomier,
Than by a graveyard fence — at the suicide graves?





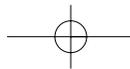
MENKE

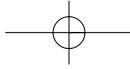
Big you are big — O Ho, my small town Svintsyan —
With the ruin demons and the poorhouse beggar,
You're almost
A whole little dot on the map.

Who else but the madman — Heershe-Leib Tarshish
Assistant Beadle of the Hasidic prayerhouse
Laments here
Every sigh of your collapsing walls.

He curses the hands that set you on fire,
He's tired of chasing the crows
That blacken
The crusts of sun on the poorhouse panes.

When the fires carry sunsets through the night,
He bends to kiss the ash of your wounds.





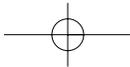
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

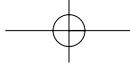
At the holiest prayers in the Hasidic prayerhouse
Heershe-Leib ponders how many pillars of smoke
Will be missed on Sabbath Eve
In the twisted chimney of the cold bath in the synagogue yard.

How many dead are recorded in the Town Register,
How many zodiac signs will fall odd, how many even,
How many tears
Still remained in the eyes of the mourners.

Night after night, he is bent in sorrow
For he cannot say the confession with the sun —
Because even
In the quietest leaves of April
Malaise blossoms.

Because even in the rustle of Yooritshka's forest
The voices of future shrieks are conspiring.





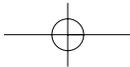
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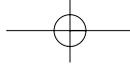
Twilight. With the horror of the ruined Holy Ark
He sits, a sick piece of evening, at the pump near the Church,
Amazed: how bright is Svintsyman.
You cannot chase the sun from the whole market place.

How beautiful is Svintsyman: at night, every stone is a star.
From the well, you cannot draw out all the shining water.
But when he hears
No angels singing in the Old Studyhouse —

Only the stamping of wounded horses, deafening
The violated synagogue with their neighing prayer,
As if
Lamenting their horsy luck to an illusory God —

Heershe-Leib remembers that Svintsyman is Hell,
And here, deeper than the sunset is the well of blood.





BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

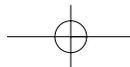
How tired he is, Heershe-Leib Tarshish, Assistant Beadle of
The Hasidic prayerhouse — King of the lice-infested poorhouse,
Tired from his forty
Old springs, tired from dragging God in his religious rags.

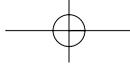
The evening winds fire-skeins in his thoughts.
In the West, the sun clamors again to the kingdom of light —
And minute after minute,
The day sinks fast, as if buried in a heavenly grave.

The dog catcher on Zablotna Street deafens the howl of the dogs.
Heershe-Leib Tarshish thinks that, with evening, the world too
dies.

Only he and Death — alone,
And even God is scared in His sinful paradise.

He knows: his soul is begging out of the cursed body,
Like a tormented flower under a gruesome stone.





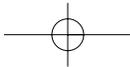
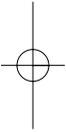
MENKE

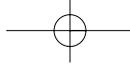
Heershe-Leib Tarshish hears an old silence resounding from the twilight
In the holy ram's horn of the wind. He sees executed armies carry
The corpse of the sun
Through the ovens of Hell — in the coffin of Og, King-of-Bashan.

With shut eyes he sees former humans hammer
Wounds and darkness into an endless cleansing board,
And wash the dead sun
With the ink of night and the blood of their own bodies.

He sees the alleys actually shrink in horror,
And he suddenly weeps a desolate prayer of demise,
Facing the first stars —
Heershe-Leib Tarshish, Assistant Beadle of the Hasidic prayerhouse.

A windy nothingness cavorts in the abandoned town square.
Heershe-Leib guards the sky — lest God flee the world.





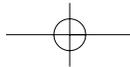
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I

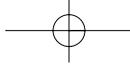
Cursed April, do not step over the desolate thresholds.
In your beams, all the dark will stand up.
The barking of empty butcher shops
Will deafen the shimmering chatter of your brooks.

How will you pair your wind's laughter — with children wheezing?
How will you raise, soft and cool, evil thorns instead of rye?
In the spiderweb of attics
You will wither in the blood of raped twelve-year-old girls.

Cursed April, do not step over the desolate thresholds.
The chained clanging of imprisoned Russians assault you
With their skeleton eyes —
Through the moldy blindness of prison cellars,
They are seeking one beam of light.

On the cheeks of anemic girls, your sky will be blue.
The shadows will exile the sun. Your night will bring no dawn.





MENKE

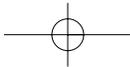
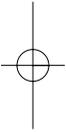
April's young female night adorns death with starts.
Heershe-Leib Tarshish crawls — a shadowy prayer near the dog catcher's shed.

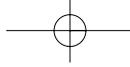
He strokes the praying tails
Of the flogged dogs, the dog-catcher will flay them at dawn.

With his corpse-like hand he conducts a choir of sixteen dogs.
He asks each dog where is Hell and the hottest place in Hell —
And from the dog catcher's death shed,
The dogs respond with a terrifying howl: there, t—h—e—r—e.

He asks, Heershe-Leib: are there depths beneath the deepest depth —
And the dogs in the shed answer
With hoarse wailing, clamoring from the catcher's axe — to the light.

Dulled with barking, the dogs merge with silence, with the pain of stars.
Heershe-Leib Tarshish counts and counts the torments of their final sleep.



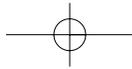
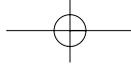
*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK I*

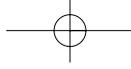
April eternally-in-love. Children blow soap rainbows through straw.
Pale, thin little girls ripen in the anguished passage to womanhood.
Grass shadows are childishly cool.
At Badonna's house,
The bashful service berry
is flaming red and raw.

Eltshik and Dveirka huddle in the orchard of Hotel Italia.
They step lightly, like thieves. Their unrest rustles in apple trees.
They hear harps play in their blood.
Dveirka lets her fresh hair down to her pretty hips.

They watch the leaves being born. The apple tree understands
What Eltshik and Dveirka are thinking, and hides them with blossoming branches.
They are alone — so much spring,
Through the roots of the tree, April sings in their senses.

Night — mystery of creation. Dveirka captures herself in Eltshik's arms.
Generations unborn flash out from her glinting eyes.

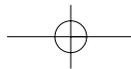
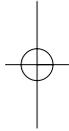


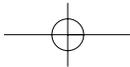
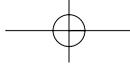


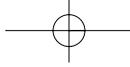
Burning Village

Book II

1938



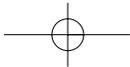


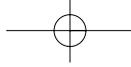


My poor Lithuanian earth —
Of Michaleshik, Svintsyanka and Svintsyan
With songs of beggars, Gypsies and birds —
Never saw any marzipan.

The juiciest orchards
Never got drunk on vines.
The bean, the onion, and the oat
Had no reason to praise God.

Mendele's mare sank in the mire,
Dragging the drowning wheels,
Limping with a flogged hide —
Through passages cleared in the forest,
Through sparse fields.
She was greeted
Here and there,
By a lone flying bat —
And by the hungry wilderness
Spotted with poison mushrooms.



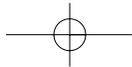


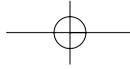
MENKE

The nobleman used to suck
With Mary's blessing, Ivan's juice.
And the rich man at the synagogue's eastern wall,
With his chicken neck in a silk *tallis*,
Eye to eye with God with a wink:
In his blessing hands
Both trembled —
Menachem-Mendel's heart and Sheina-Sheindel's poverty.

Winter stood in the huts
Wrapped in gray smoke.
At night, flaming eyes were scared
By wolves, ghosts, and robbers.

The potato peasant
Roasted himself a pig only in Jesus' honor
And seldom sang
Except on the sad paths to the cemetery
As he carried a corpse to God
And the church bells echoed the death.





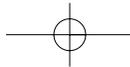
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

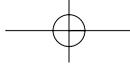
The summer crop was good —
With garlic, chickens, meager rye.
Sad cattle marched through dawn
To the shepherds' happy horn.

Aromas of chaff and hay
Cradled the day in the barn.
Bushes smelled of bees and honey,
Berries, wild strawberries, and acorns.

The big, stoked-up oven,
As sunrise — a smoking alley,
Baked flowery potatoes at the rooster's first crow.
And the poker shuffled with an iron hand
Like top hats of giants — pots with tasty kasha.

For every peasant
The field, the sun, and the long day waited.
Then there was strength for bitter toil.
The plowshare was a friend of the horse
And the sickle was a friend of the blacksmith's fire.



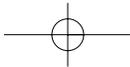


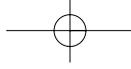
MENKE

The Sabbath calm was sliced by a sword.
Tempests swept away the nights,
And there is no night.
Conflagrations burned the days,
And there is no day.
The sun is dark on cinder walls.

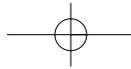
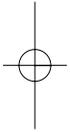
My poor Lithuanian earth —
Of Svintsyan, Michaleshik and Svintsyanke,
Sown not with rye, not potatoes,
But with nettles, carcasses and worms —
A sick sun
Dries the dead guts
Of children, soldiers, horses.

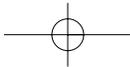
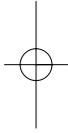
My poor Lithuanian earth —
Shimmering with pitch and sulfur,
Is not worth a head of cabbage,
A loaf of rye bread.

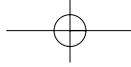




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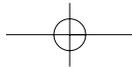
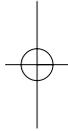
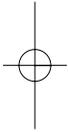


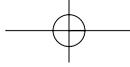


*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II*

And poverty
Took Badonna's children away
And carried them from Svintsyan on wayward roads.
Alone, in nights of terror,
She hears
Hungry wolves howl at every child
She cuddles Yeisinke in his sleep
And talks in sick dreams:
"O which one shall I mourn first."

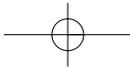
And Badonna's children wandered
On separate roads — lost roads,
Through starry nights and blind nights.
Badonna's children wandered —
Though echoes of screaming shrapnel
Through the distant wailing of ripped-up soldiers.
Each of them seeking his lost luck:
Bread, bread, b—r—e—a—d!

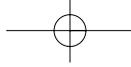




MENKE

The straight days of April are scrunching
Through Badonna.
Under her skin she hides the names
Of her scattered children:
Eltshik, Berke, Menke, Bloomka.
The empty house is filled with their absence.
In the vase —
The unwatered flowers remember them.
The rain has not washed away
Their footsteps in the dusty yard.
The old cat climbed on the highest shelf —
Sitting shiva on the abandoned crockery.

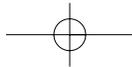


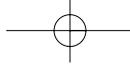


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

In the spring air of the gray house
Emptiness whistles a nagging tune.
Under the blankets of the unmade beds
The warmth of her wandering children still smolders.
Badonna hears
They trod through desolate villages,
Seeking in the guts of bony earth
Stolen carrots and overripe potatoes:
Treasures hidden from jolly plows.

Through the windows, in the open hallway,
Breezes still prattle
The silenced children's talk.
Every corner — old and weary,
Listens to the street,
The parting song of the evening.



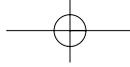
*MENKE*

But Yeiske was happy with the gloom,
What need does he have for brothers and sisters —
Who have no more tears to cry,
Who turn over their eyes in fear
At every screech of the door
And think
That of all lives, death is best.

Yeiske, his belly puffed up with water,
His bare feet like twisted shoes,
Looks thin and thorny —
As if the unsown fields gave birth to him.

His blue eyes
Never saw ripe stalks.
His angry lips
Never suckled milk.

Strong as his wooden rifle,
He runs bravely through the empty house,
Imagining himself a hero on a valiant steed —
His thin shadow leaping on the desolate walls.
Like a hero, he fells down the chairs and benches,
And strides over the floor
As over fallen soldiers in a battlefield.
He hears
The benches like wounded soldiers
Beg him humbly:
“Help us, O Yeiske, O victor!”
But Yeiske, with rifle butt on the dying heads,
Waves the last blows —
Pity does not befit a warrior.



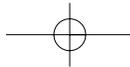
Night.
The candle breathes its last drops.
Badonna watches at his cradle:
“Under Yeiske’s cradle,
There is no white goat.

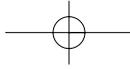
“Since the waking world can mete out only calamity
You must believe the lie in your dream:
Once upon a time, a wise sheep
Met a lost shepherd —
And if you fall fast asleep,
The story will tell itself
In your caressing sleep.

“When you sleep, so far and deep,
I’m in reality, you — in magic that sings.
In my reality — your dead mother screams,
In your magic — her hair is wings.

“Your mother high in heaven
Is weary of flying so swell —
She’d say goodbye to the angels
And sing you a song of Hell:

“When you came into the world,
My blood did spill your luck,
The storms took a rest at my side.
Sated crows sat on fences in crowns.
Cannons smashed the gloom of small towns.
Spring brought your mother of flowers a tide.”

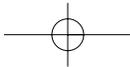


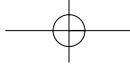


MENKE

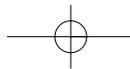
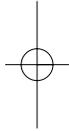
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And sing you a song of Hell:

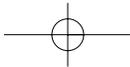
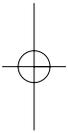
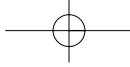
“Under Yeiske’s cradle
There is no white goat —
Riddled bodies swing you high
With their snorting song.
The flames of war huddle you
Huddle-dull-dull.
So how should Badonna
With wringing hands cuddle you?
So how should Badonna
Raise you — in a cradle of fire?”

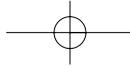




Menke and Bloomka





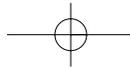
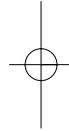


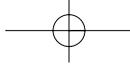
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

Menke loaded a carriage with pillows
And harnessed himself like a horse.
He led Bloomka by her thin hand —
For good luck, at his side.

Through hidden paths, through crow-filled fields,
The two roaming children
With a carriage full of pillows
Measured the distant roads —
Maybe someone would
Trade a slice of bread for a pillow.

Menke thought,
Bloomka will help push the carriage —
But when Menke cried,
She helped him weep.

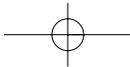


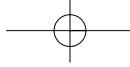


MENKE

The carriage pants heavily uphill
Through the screeching sand.
Menke and Bloomka watch
Deep in the evening valley
Svintsyan shimmers in all the colors of decline.
Sunset changed the town into a golden dream.
April dozes off on the shot-through roofs.
In their mother's house, with walls like cleansing-boards,
Death dwells, all dressed up.

Bloomka shouts:
The mountain is high, going up to the sky.
Menke tells her
That Og, King of Bashan was even higher.
Opposite, the day burns in the west —
He selected his own fire for an Angel of Death.

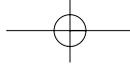


*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II*

Twilight walked with them —
Through swampy meadows,
Past croaking ponds,
And suddenly, it showed the children:
A Jew hangs on a tree by his *tefillin*,
His hands crucified by spears.
At his side,
The wind leafs torn pages of a ripped up prayerbook,
And in a Hebrew Bible —
The miracles of Our Teacher Moses
Are soaked in blood.

Bloomka laments with all her limbs —
To the dying sun:
Heershe-Leib Tarshish, Heershe-Leib Tarshish,
Assistant Beadle of the Hasidic prayerhouse.

Heershe-Leib Tarshish on the tree,
Swaying in prayer
As once —
When through the long, rainy days,
He sat at the soaked graves,
Chasing away all thunder and lightning with blessings,
And mumbling like a demon:
“O God,
Be you more Lord and me more Slave.”



MENKE

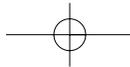
Menke petted the hanging toes
And lingeringly kissed the violated *tefillin*:
“Heershe-Leib Tarshish, Heershe-Leib Tarshish,
Who will now bless the catcher’s dogs
When they expire in their kennel of death —
With a last, sad bark?

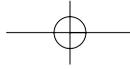
“Who will count every stone in Svintsyan
And like you
Through bony fingers, sift a handful of sand,
And say:
As the number of grains, the calamities for people.

“In Elul, this sacred month
Who will now quarrel with the first cold wind
And intoxicate his thin body
On the prayers, as if tasty wines?

“Who like you will understand
The confessions buzzed by late summer flies,
When the mossy houses of the synagogue yard
Shine in autumn gold?

“Heershe-Leib Tarshish, Heershe-Leib Tarshish,
If hunger did not crawl like a worm
Through my bones,
I would have broken the strong tree trunk
And made you a bed of my carriage full of pillows.
I would have run back to Svintsyan with you,
Cleansed you on the cleansing-board,
And put you nicely to sleep
Among the most venerable graves.”

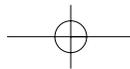


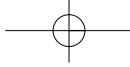


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

Twilight changed Heershe-Leib into a ball of fire.
In his dead beard
Breezes smelled of April buds.
The gallows tree
With all its leaves — swept an aromatic dust,
And Heershe-Leib, like a scarecrow,
Chased the birds away from the tree.

In the dark of the calm evening,
Menke and Bloomka lamented,
And the frogs in distant ponds heard:
Heershe-Leib Tarshish, Heershe-Leib Tarshish,
Assistant Beadle of the Hasidic prayerhouse.

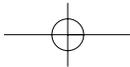




MENKE

Menke watches
How painful it is for the sun to part with Heershe-Leib,
He sees — under the mountain:
Our Teacher Moses — in a house
With windows of angels instead of panes.
Menke calls
As with the fingers of an imagined hand:
“Come, Our Teacher Moses, O come.”

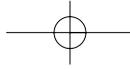
And from rusty tablets
Our Teacher Moses emerges like a sunset stripe,
His eyes —
Strayed sparks of Mount Sinai lightning.
He walks at the abyss of sulfur and stone,
Leading his people with rips on their clothes.
Two thousand autumns float by fast,
Bearing
Of all the withered leaves — an endless mourning banner.
Over it all — ancient nights
Open all dams of dark and weeping.



Late evening,
Our Teacher Moses sways over Menke,
With a body of night and a head of flickering sun:
“Say now
What you want, my child.”

“O Our Teacher Moses,
I want to die with this day,
Fall asleep in its fire,
But you must wake me again
In a hundred years,
When my limbs are made of stars
And my mouth is mute from a hundred years of silence.
You must wake me again,
When the mill of time still grinds my last bone,
When with half-erased letters on my tombstone
I shall sing in a silent choir —
The legend of the last hundred years.

“O Our Teacher Moses,
The years that God owes me —
Split them into single days,
Each day — until the next —
Holds a hundred years in its vise.
Some time in a storm, some time in restless fire,
I shall patiently wait
From one century to the next.
Yet when the last day
Of my seventy years — prepares for its last death,
Let me disappear in eternity
And with my disappearance —
Let the weeping of man and animal
Fall silent.”



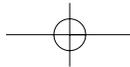
MENKE

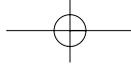
Facing Menke — Our Teacher Moses writes
With drops of sun on a black note:
“Yes, my child,
Your seventy years —
God will split them as you wish.

“As you’re dying now,
My Menke — eleven-year-old child,
Of your early-felled life, God will give you
Every century — one single day.

“When in your grave you find such a day,
Your remaining bones will move —
Awakening rays of a long extinguished dawn.
Thus, every century you will rise
In your little town Svintsyan —
To go down with the first sunset.

“When you stand on a mountain of millennia,
A new mountain will trod and trample you.
Of the last century, your last sunset
Will flicker out — in its falling march:
Eternity itself will go under.”

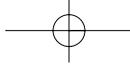


*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II*

The sun and Menke shrink
And rush somewhere so fast — so fast.
Both have one moment left.
The sun — a wound spun a thousand millennia.
Menke whispers so low — so low,
Just Our Teacher Moses can hear him:
(Bloomka dozed off from his good words)
He embraces death as a dear friend.

Menke whispers
And thinks
His voice beats with an ancient force,
His voice
With a thundering roar — roams everywhere:
“When I, Menke, die,
Death himself will die —
So I must hurry now
With every wind —
To be king in the Land of Not Being.”

Menke whispers
And thinks
He’s heard — by sun, man, worm,
Earth, sky, and Heershe-Leib Tarshish
Who barely moves,
Opposite, on the gallows-tree,
As if trudging slowly to Svintsyán.

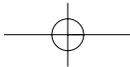


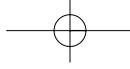
MENKE

Bloomka wakes from her long doze
And sees
Menke — a skeleton stick,
Eyes — two sunset stains,
Groping his way to the grave.
She cuddles up to him — a lump of fear:
“Menke! Menke!
Don’t go, don’t leave me.”
Above them,
The evening — a faint butterfly,
Beats with his single wing.

At nightfall
Menke saw
How Our Teacher Moses —
Hid again in the tablets.
And Menke saw:
He was left with Bloomka, the hunger,
And a desolate carriage full of pillows.

All around: stars and far-away cannon clatter,
Chasing hosts of birds in scared circles.

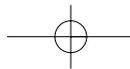
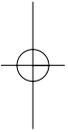


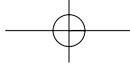


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

Clouds veil the spring stars,
Are loaded up high, heavier and heavier,
As if they prepare to destroy their own strength.
Clouds burst in generations of tears
And shake the children's bones under the skin.

Menke hides Bloomka
Under the soaking pillows.
They remain — alone
With rain and wind — and death,
With vanished figures of Our Teacher Moses.



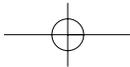
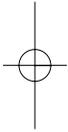


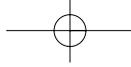
MENKE

Rain needs no bed,
Wind needs no rest,
But Menke — with Bloomka in the carriage, is slow.
Through its open patches
Rivulets stream — the distant clouds.
Through each of his limbs, the faraway cries.

Menke sees
The prayer of straying roads:
O God,
Why did You curse us so
That no wanderer's steps
Will find rest with us.

And the children, bound to the weariness,
Lay down on the blind road —
A rainy hand flayed their thin bodies.
And as to a healing force, the children
Gave themselves to the angry night
And listened long to the rain
Telling with bitter tears:
Somewhere far, somewhere far away — life abides.



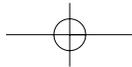


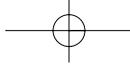
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

One dawn, the children drag themselves home —
Without pillows, or bread, or Our Teacher Moses.
Sleep stuck to their lashes
And crooked woods circled in a dance:
With people trodden down,
With people covered in the ground,
Still alive.

The night fled as from a fire
And the day caught up with it.
Dawn met Shurka the Russian —
Awake to the thinnest rustle of words.

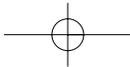
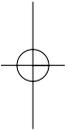
The May night hid Shurka from the enemy.
Now
He sits on a tree:
A bird from a make believe dream.
In one eye —
Germans with blue swords in their arms,
In the other —
Longing Katia, bent over his picture.

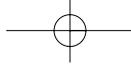




MENKE

Menke and Bloomka
Whisper in the anguished silence
And shuffle secretly out of the woods —
But Shurka, in fear of rustling branches,
Grew into the tree,
Remained with the dream of his lost Katia:
“I love, O I love you, my Katinka,
As strong as a heart can love.”





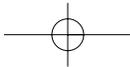
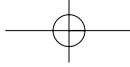
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

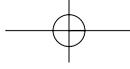
Shurka watches in the woods
Anthills — suspiciously moving,
And somewhere,
Crickets in old huts — saw up his luck.

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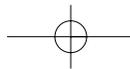
And the straying children are seeking home — long, long
Through the wasteland of the earth in May.
Around them,
Rushing to battle — endless caravans
Of Germans with rifles, with weary songs.
The horses' hooves
Choking the fresh, dewy grass.

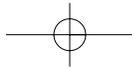
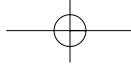
Bloomka shows Menke —
A cloud looks just
Like the burned down synagogue in Svintsyon:
“See, Menke, Menke see,
In the sky too,
There is Heershe-Leib Tarshish —
Assistant Beadle of the Hasidic prayerhouse.





Back Home





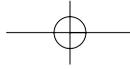
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

Who
Does the July night dress up for,
Who could enjoy its gnawing beauty
If not Menke and Bloomka,
Walking
From the nearby mountain
And seeing — not in a dream anymore —
Stars over the roofs of Svintsyan.

At the foot of the mountain — juicy shtshav grows.
Each leaf washed in purest dew.
The terrified houses of Poshmena Street
Clamor up to the strong mountain.
Behind closed shutters
Everybody's heart runs
As if someone were chasing it.

On Zablorna Street — gangs of dogs
Straying like mourners,
Barking a dog's Kaddish
For Heershe-Leib Tarshish,
Assistant Beadle of the Hasidic prayerhouse.

Shurka, the escaped Russian,
Disguised as a blind beggar,
Seeks news of his blond Katia —
Seeks the lost light of his world.

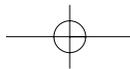


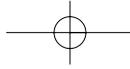
MENKE

In the Synagogue Yard — the desolate poorhouse
Greets the New Moon with its own prayers.
Chaim-Meir of Svir,
In a woman's shawl with fringes — instead of a *tallis*,
Wearing one boy's shoe and one girl's shoe,
Half-boy, half-girl —
Prays incessantly:
"O moon, moon,
Give us a slice of bread —
And they'll like you in the World to Come
As they like you in This World."

The Prussian King in his tin crown,
His throat stretched upward as for slaughter,
Crows hoarsely to the moon:
"You demon's head,
Don't dwell in Svintsyas's sky,
Don't follow us ever so slow:
Run, moon —
Flee to the pre-Genesis void!"

"God Almighty — Lord of both worlds,
This is Leah, Queen of the Prussian King, speaking to you:
Give me strength — to curse all laughter,
Give me strength to read you the women's prayer
And on all evil decrees — to cry, cry, cry,
Because for everyone, it is too late to laugh!"



*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II*

Itshe-Heersh the Convert — prays with a twang:
“Ay, every hair of my dark beard,
As holy as a Midnight Vigil —
May it now be a curse
Against the moon,
Let it not meander like a slut
In our ruined towns.”

And Yeshiye the Blinker greets the New Moon
With a snorting Kol-Nidre tune:
“Ay-Ay-Ay, Ay-Ay, Oy-Oy,
Eyes are a disaster, eyes are a sore.
Had man not seen God’s light,
Blindness itself would be — day.
If there be no eyes anywhere,
There would be no tears anymore —
Ay-Ay-Ay, Ay-Ay, Oy-Oy.”

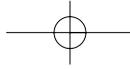
And at holy prayers,
Meishke the Crook suddenly jumps in:
“Hey God, You braggart, I bet You,
I’ll chase you into your death rest —
Get out of the stars, the graves, the grass,
Ooze out like Shurka’s blind eyes.
If your farsight can bring to people no light,
Maybe better — to find light in the darkness.”

MENKE

On Goat Street,
A narrow stripe of July sky.
Shurka the Blind crawls
Toward Menke and Bloomka,
Hitting with his sturdy stick
The weak, straying light
Of the old alley — he is
The moon's loneliness.

Shurka imagines,
On a spiderwebbed board opposite him
A captured fly speaks to a star:
“Disappear, my shining one, my love,
Don't let your beauty in here —
Let the enemy devour me in darkness,
O leave me alone with my pain.”

In Synagogue Yard — the poorhouse
Leads the moon through the most fieriest chambers of Hell.
Behind Badonna's house —
The July night lays
Star-like patches on the barn full of holes
And the emptiness roars in the deep ice cellar,
Like distant lament in a bloodcurdling pit.

*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II*

A rustling restlessness woke Badonna.
She is suffused with lightness like magic.
Did a wind resound in the panes,
Did she hear her children in a dream?
Intimate words caressed her.
A voice sang of happiness,
The curse of the earth will disappear.
She looks eagerly up to the sky —
Above her,
Airy silver softly treads.
Only the star-spread God scares her,
As if He intimated evil secrets.

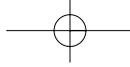
Suddenly,
Dream changed into reality,
And the empty house was filled with joyful crying.
Menke, moved to fear —
Trembling bone and skin,
Smells of blood and forest blossoms.
And Bloomka — naked as Eve,
Adorned in July stars —
Explodes her joy in a wild song.
In the midnight house,
Her song roars — a splintered bullet.
Joy to death gnaws deep and somber.

MENKE

Badonna's gaze so gently caresses:
"My dear children,
Every day — a hundred years I was waiting for you.
Under what sky, on what roads
Did you wander —
Lost sheep without a shepherd?
How many days did the sun forget you?
How many rains washed you?
What hand fed you crumbs of food?
What stone gave you sleep?"

Menke and Bloomka
Pour health and calm into their limbs.
Badonna is busy at the stove — fast-fast:
"I've got tasty shtshav,
I'll put up mealy potatoes."

Yeiske, alone in the biggest bed,
Turns half-awake
And sees:
The July night embraces him,
Gives him purses full of silver.
On his cheeks, a distant moon flower flickers.
Through the little window — the sky
Seems to him — an endless bread,
Strewn with millions of caraway stars.



BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

Quiet.
On the roofs, hours sit and bear a crushed dawn.
Chaim-Meir of Svir
Shuffles —
Around the twisted walls of the Old Studyhouse,
Thinking,
Sadly-sadly:
God lives in holy words of Torah Scrolls.

Chaim-Meir of Svir cheers God up
And goes all around — a shadow-circle,
Dancing with his beggar's stick.
The fingertips jump pious and quiet —
Not to waken evil spirits.

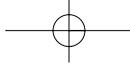
Chaim-Meir of Svir cheers God up
Claps for him a You-You tune with his skeleton hands:
You, You, You-You-You-You—
In Svir You, in Svintsyan You,
In Michaleshik You, in Klushan You,
You, You, You-You-You-You.

MENKE

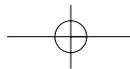
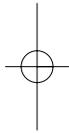
When the children
Ate heartily by the light of a lighting-rod
Night departed Badonna's house,
Forgetting a slice of moon on a windowpane.

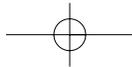
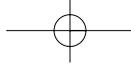
But Yeiske
Ripped the joy with coughing screams.
He kicked the dawn,
As if he wanted to stop the night
With his crooked legs.
A soft potato in his angry mouth,
At every bite
He stammered:
"H-h-h-hate, h-hate!
H-h-hate everybody!"

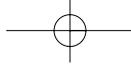
The sun pointed at Yeiske,
A scarlet stain — big as a fig.
With eyes — gaping horror,
He beamed in the dawn,
Like a glowing creature
Looming up from the smoldering fireplace:
Bitter and born old.



Berke





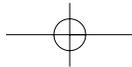


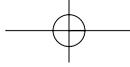
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

An orchard at the battle near the village Grivvat.
Spilled marrow nourished the roots,
Rounded the forms of apples and pears.
Every clod of earth was once a valiant soldier.

Berke, shrunk and yellow — a little old man,
Rented his childish strength to the nobleman:
He paces in the orchard — a scared guard,
Holding a quivering stick
Against hungry guys.

In the day, Berke watches the boss's dog,
Lest someone cook it for a dinner.
At night, the dog watches him
Lest he gather an extra pear.



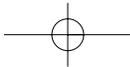


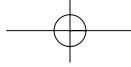
MENKE

Autumn came with days full of fire,
As if the battles destined summer to die too.
Now it is gruesomely still.
Leafy corpses chatter in the wind:
Autumn, the gravedigger, will take a long time
To bury summer.

Unsown rye — in desolate fields.
Crickets cry to fill the empty barns.
Deep in the earth,
Stray skulls — pricking like thorns.

Somewhere, a brook murmurs, dying,
As the last words of fathers, shot in battles.
Tree branches — yellow, withering banners.
Here and there,
The last sweet fruits recall
Widows suffused with hot desires.

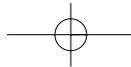


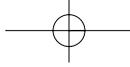


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

On ancient fruit trees, crows build their nests,
Worms gnaw their way through rotten bark.
Every tree — a ghastly stick.
The leaves plucked by the wind
Beg to return from dust to the treetops,
Cry their sorrow from the Otherworld:
“Too early, too early were we sent to the Devil.”

Only the young apple trees
Illuminate autumn with their springtime innards.
Every twig shines with gold air.
The dead leaves sing in the wind
And clamor to the burial:
“O brothers, down from the branches,
Soon, a hundred frosts will dwell here.
Our every vein is yellowed.
Soon, a snowy mother will pay a call.”

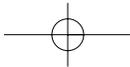


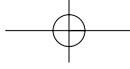


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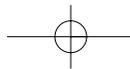
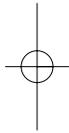
In the orchard — a dark swirl of graves.
As an amulet for a bright heaven,
The dead soldiers clasp their hands.
The rain half erased their courage on the wooden boards.
The wind twisted their holiness on the crosses.

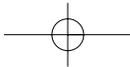
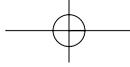
Berke — a withering piece of autumn.
Moon dots shuffle on every straw of his shed.
He sees the soldiers under the earth,
Senses their full shadows on lunar twigs.
And Berke doesn't know —
Is he
The guard of the nobleman's dog and the last fruit here,
Or of the soldiers under the earth?

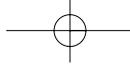




A Telegram



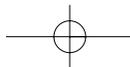


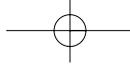


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

Eve of Rosh Hashonah.
In Svintsyan, the evening wind,
As if blowing the holy ram horn, calls:
The sun is in danger.

Grains of dust hover in the air
Filled with God's warnings and curses
As if the earth were preparing to fly.
Each grain of dust bears a black Day of Judgment.
Even Itshe-Heersh the Convert
Climbed onto the Holy Ark,
And began to kneel at the fearsome Torah Scrolls,
Until the irritated Synagogue Yard attacked him,
Young and old — with pokers and angry dogs.





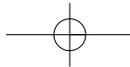
MENKE

In Badonna's house,
The weekdays banished the holidays —
Rosh Hashonah wallows in the damp cellar,
Cuddling up to the paraffin of bedripped candle sticks.

The emptiness of the dusty dishes gnaws Badonna's heart.
Her restless fingers play in the air,
As if she were kneading twisted loaves of wheat.
The dying smell of autumn
Coiled in her every bone.

On a gloomy wall,
A shadow draws her bony figure.
She feels the past as close as her own nightgown.
Of all times past, today is more distant.
The past burns soft, like a menorah.
Today —
Shining through the deepest nights, with human pyres.

Bloomka floats in her memory,
In a river of milky shtshav:
"Mama, mama,
What is tastier than shtshav?"
"Little Bloomka, my child,
Before God quarreled with man,
Golden wheat swayed in the corpse fields.
This sad table
Smelled of challah, songs, jolly wine,
Cake and nuts, and good luck —
Was enough for poor guests too.



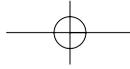
MENKE

Suddenly, the door leaped.
A postman shattered the moment of rest:
The house in horror — a gaping grave.
The whitewashed walls wearing shrouds.

Menke, a little old Jew,
Drags himself up to Badonna,
His eyes staring at the soot-covered ceiling:
“Mama! Mama!
A te! le! grama!
Eltshik is in Boovitz — with dysentery.”

“My Eltshik! My *Elinke!* My black holiday!
My only firstborn son!
What fire carries you now?
May a crow carry the brains of the German
Who captured you for the labor camp.

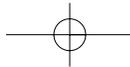
“How could I
Shed my painful skin
And disappear?
O darkness of a graveyard cleansing room,
Hide me from God and the stars.”

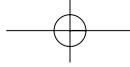


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

A stripe of evening dissolves in the cell
On Eltshik's empty cot.
The telegram steals away
From Badonna's scared fingers,
And hovers in the desolate house,
As a black note from God.

Menke tells the children
That in a dream he saw
Eltshik's head — on a German spear.
Suddenly,
As after the Messiah — a wonder from the Otherworld —
The head escaped from the spear
And leaped back onto the neck.
Bloomka chatters tooth against tooth,
But Yeiske is not afraid of the spear — Eltshik's head,
Because
With him gone, there is more shtshav in the pot.



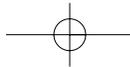


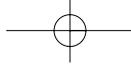
MENKE

Moony silence.
Bloomka is amazed
That in great Svintsyman,
There is no earth, only silver and more silver.
So much light can pierce the walls and roofs,
As if the night leapt from its place
And is jumping around with the stars.

As from one wound to another, Badonna goes to Berke:
“And where is Berke?
My pensive, always chilly *Berrele*.
Where will he find an oven
To heat the holes in his cold shirt?
In a strange place, he must be
Ashamed in front of the stones.

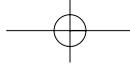
“O my green, sad *Berrele* —
God knows how much he longs for Esterka ‘Stubun’.
Esterka, Isser the butcher’s girl,
Who was never caught by the most catching Spanish flu,
And at fourteen
She’s a pure butcher shop — every pound of her flesh.
With dark, gypsy braids,
She rushes by so healthy —
Even the heaviest buckets of water
Are afraid of her butchery hands.”



*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II*

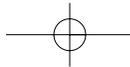
Gnawing longing
For Eltshik and Berke attacks the children.
Tears burn the shining eyes.
Yeiske won't remember his "brothers."
With his wooden rifle,
He marches like a soldier, wise —
Chases the walls out of the house
And threatens death — with death:
"Th-th-the l-l-little l-l-loaf of b-b-bread
Is s-s-small enough."

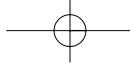
On a cinder, by the smoking lighting rod,
Yeiske sits down, a pensive little man,
And, as by magic, he still hears
The strange legends Eltshik used to tell:
Of an empty hut that went up to the clouds
And through the hollowness, saw God.
Of a mountain, that now dwells in a valley.
Of a night, that lives in peace with the sun.
Of a tomorrow's tomorrow, that strayed into the past.
Of a flower that emerged from under a stone
And healed a wounded angel with its fragrance,
And of the most beautiful dream
God himself dreamed.



MENKE

Badonna too is borne away by tales,
Through distant forests with raging bears.
Weariness makes her anguish sleepy.
Half dozing,
She hears
The approaching steps of Judgment Day
Resound in every windowpane.
Half dozing,
She sees on the church cross
Eltshik's last night dawning like hell.

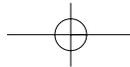


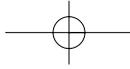


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

Dawn.
Badonna assembles the children in a heap —
Withering, pretty flowers:
“O children, Menke, Bloomka, Yeiske,
Even the longest night must come to an end.
You’ll see, as the sun comes out of darkness, so Berke will come,
And will never, never leave us again.
As a tree holds on to its root and trunk,
We will hold ourselves together.

“And Eltshik told me in my dream
That he’s alive! Alive!
A blessing hand hovered before him
And showed him a silver mountain
Made of his days.
Each day with no blood, no tears.
So let us go to Eltshik, children
To Elinke in Boovitz, in Boovitz.
As long as the hard road may be,
Our joy will be even longer
If only Eltshik may live! Live!
A lightning will split every cloud
And spill all the evil to the bottom.



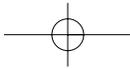


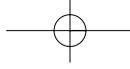
MENKE

And Badonna leaves
On the road to her Eltshik somewhere,
In God's hands,
Holding Menke and Bloomka by their blue hands.

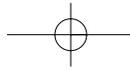
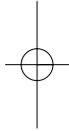
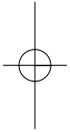
Four gloomy dots disappear from Svintsyan in the dark.
Roads of poverty, fire, and trenches.
At night, Eltshik is a frightening apparition.
Bloomka's beautiful braids look like a noose to Menke.

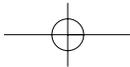
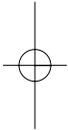
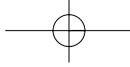
Yeiske, a fantastic little beggar bent down to his knees,
With the wooden rifle on his shoulder,
In an attack pose —
Leads them all forward! Forward!

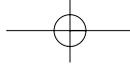




The Red Army in Svintsyan







BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

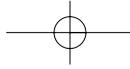
Autumn.

Around Svintsyan, the gloomy bushes,
Part from so many leaves of wood sorrel.
The ashberry trees are red as with consumption.
The street gutters wallow in cold swamps.
The weeping of leaves hovers over dead summer.

Dawn.

The sunrise frames
The Synagogue Yard in scarlet.
Belated flies buzz up erased yesterdays.
Under hills of poverty, the shining houses sigh —
Light and desolation make love on the sinking walls.
In the poorhouse, the night sits shiva for herself:
Here, curses hurl green gall on the world.
Lice-infested beggars awake.
Sunny hands gather fistfuls of night from the windowpanes.
And the Bolsheviks come to chase
The remaining dark,
With word and bullet.





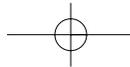
MENKE

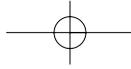
Bolsheviks — striding countries:
Cannons, men, horses,
March and march as from infinity,
Shaking centuries of gloom out of the ancient alleys.

Bolsheviks, their rifles attached with strings,
Like children playing soldier.
On their proud uniforms — patches and patches,
On their tanned bodies — raw, festering wounds.

Bolsheviks limping on crutches,
Bent like old people in a funeral march.
In their young ribs, bullets rust.
Sleep shut their dull eyes.

Brave Bolsheviks on tormented horses —
Before them, hunger — a raging banner.
Bolsheviks in the lightning of bright swords,
Dressed in loaded fire.

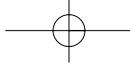


*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II*

But Dveirka hid from the prettiest dawn
Behind the mold of crumbling walls.
Thin stripes of day in cracks of closed shutters,
Show her, as through shards of a broken mirror
Men with hatred, with dry palates,
In armored rags — on horses' bones,
As if by Resurrection come, keep coming.

And Dveirka whispers just one prayer, over and over:
“O Eltshik, where are you, my only one, my love?
I saw your light
When the young dawn
Met the old night, eye to eye
And choked the darkness
In holes of attics.

“So much light
Of you, is in all my limbs.
In the chase of weary horses,
In the fighting of falling airplanes,
I find the quietest quiet in the mad roaring.
And I call you,
Pious, as a breeze that barely sways a twig:
Come to me, my beloved, O come.
Your hair — chestnut brown,
I saw in my lonely shadow,
Framed in black.

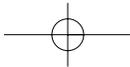


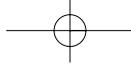
MENKE

The mill is mute, empty kneading troughs molding.
Cows chew the mossy walls of stables.
On snowed in roads, dark shadows of beggars' sacks.
Hunger attacked like a giant skeleton.

In the abandoned ice yard —
Nights die, longing for Badonna.
At Rocha-Feiga's smithy,
The sun rises on swollen children.

Back in spring, the Germans cut
Raw stalks with their swords,
And in the blossoming earth traded
A bullet in the heart for bread.
A jolly crow greeted
Every thorn in the ripped-up rye —
The summer lay on the edges of thorns.
On blood and dung — barren days were born.

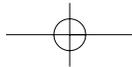


*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II*

Battles warm the frosty sky.
Nights shimmer with the glowing ash of burned people.
Poshmena Street screams and shouts with nearby cannons —
The stones move, as to attack someone.

Hunger bloated the “King of Prussia”
Like a gigantic bladder.
In the bright frost, he turns blue
And dreams of his own six feet —
To rest in the summer grass.

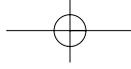
Frost felled its murderous weapon.
His nails dug into the snow,
As if digging his own grave,
The King of Prussia lies
With his tin crown — rusted, vanquished.
Above him warm flakes of snow
Illuminate the dirt in his staring eyes.



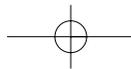
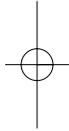
MENKE

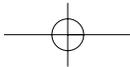
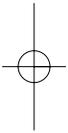
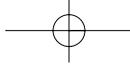
Behind the town, the gravediggers
Screech up the days with grieving spades.
In the graveyard hut,
The sun, through holes in the roof
Pours the bright snow over cleansing-boards.

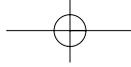
Leah, Queen of the Prussian King,
Caresses an old suckling infant with her wringing fingers,
And piously darkens the gold of frosty days
With her hunchbacked shadow.
Leah, Queen of the Prussian King,
Over a women's prayerbook, begs tearfully:
"O God,
Come down from the sky to Svintsyan in the guise of bombs —
To exterminate the hunger and the Bolsheviks like a plague."



In a Hut in Shimenishik





*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II*

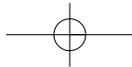
Yeiske “marches” on the road — a hero
Who pushed back Svintsyán with his giant steps
Though many a wild night
With dogs, storms and forest
Remain — to cross to Elinke.

The late sun — dragged on
To an old hut —
The limbs — heavy and cold.
Night and low ceilings in Shimenishik:
God is covered with clouds
The village is a thousand times blind.

The hut strayed here from a dream,
Smells of moss, smoke, earthen floor.
The window panes — evil toys
For the wind to play with.

They say
Many a time, the moon
Would have changed here into frost,
But Shisheela the ancient fortune teller
Avoided the Devil.

They say
The approaching battle
Doesn't shake the walls in rage —
Jesus himself
Rocks the village in His arms.

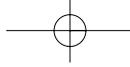


MENKE

Shimenishik neighs with horses, grunts with pigs.
Alien land and unfriendly sky gnaw at your heart.
The snowy autumn turns yellow in Badonna.
She is grayer than all the clouds.
She imagines
She's a cloud, a vestige of the flood,
And Menke, Bloomka, Yeiske —
Figures banished from hell.

Menke hears
The distance calls
With voices of ripped up soldiers.
Bloomka, an ear to the ground
Shouts:
As far as America — to Father.

Somewhere in an attic
Father languishes in yellowed letters.
His words — sharp as spears.
The lines, arranged like bars.
Bloomka hopes
She will erase the bars
Till Father suddenly emerges from the letters —
With cake, milk, and candy.

*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II*

The hut is twisted by its many generations.
In the beams, ancient winters dwell
And spiders weave their nets through mossy beards.
At dawn, Badonna will
Rouse the children for the long trek.
But now, as great as the dark is her grief,
Through the straw of the withered roof
One cold star flashes
Like a shimmering rapier in fencing.
Now she will chase the ugly night
Out of the old hut with fine stories:

“I shall not begin my tale with
Once upon a time,
Once there was a king,
So that you, children, will believe me.

“I shall not invent for you
Dwarfs dwelling in caves,
I shall not weave my tale
Of flying bears

“But of simple wonders,
How beauty can turn into a thief —
About children — through frost,
Through forest and starry charm.



MENKE

“One was called Bloomka,
For in the prettiest field
She would have been blooming,
In the darkest luck she was bright.

“Her eyes — shining gloom,
Her heart — true magic:
A handful of pure summers
In the mire of the village.

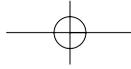
“O children, the second one
Was called Booma,
For with one crooked eye
She saw everything crooked.

“Bloomka eleven, Booma twelve,
Went with the wind
To see how fear gazes in the woods,
To hear stories of wolves.

“For three days and three nights,
They disappeared somewhere,
And the whole town ran
To chase the ghosts from the graveyard.

“They see
Stars build houses on the simple ground.
They hear
Children come back from cheider with gray beards.

“The angry moon is green
In the burial hut.
A cloudy corpse ties itself to
The frosty sky.



BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

“The snow is a whirlwind
In magical dance,
Swirling and rocking — rollicking
Partying away the fear.

“Coats of old people dance,
And patches and shawls
Flapping voices of wind —
All alleys together.

“The snow planted mountains
In the deepest valleys,
And paints for all
A world of shrouds.

“The snow covers over
The tallest grass of the Kumsa,
And does not leave even
A shadow of the children.

“The ice on the Viliya
Promises cautiously
To bring them in the summer
On straying ice floes.

MENKE

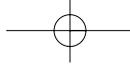
“The winter, with all its fury,
Assaulted Michaleshik,
Only Queen Noodleswirl
Knows if the frost will fall.

“Without Bloomka and Booma
Two huts wait, freezing wounds.
The walls bend more crooked,
With wrinkles of whitewash,
Smothered by generations.

“On top of straw roofs
Snow towers grow —
Both angels and demons
Made out of silver.

“Here life struggles
As before the last confession.
The bakery is rich
With smoke and soot.

“The chimney coughs through a wall,
Mirrored in fires of frost.
You can reach out and touch
The wings of the Angel of Death.



BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

“And how many times the sun
Has died in the west,
So many times the night
Has been her newest victim.

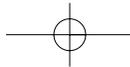
“But now the dark
Swallowed the evening.
It seems as if the sun
Has sunk for ever.

“The town has already counted
Every shadow of four nights.
The frost — a knife through the forest,
Slaughtering the branches.

“Petrooshke the Chimney Sweep
Fearing frost and forest
Fled in such a night
From a climbing dream.

“The freezing blackness holds
A strange, stifled weeping,
As if a plucked devil
Bewailing his rips.

“Hordes of flies clamoring
Through threads of spider web —
Or a desolate humming
Of leaping ghosts?



MENKE

“Around the graveyard Petrooshke chases
The hidden wailing.
Beyond the fence, the sinful graves
Want to be the first to dawn.

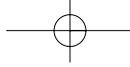
“He seeks a crying
As of a half-slaughtered child:
Fear itself would
Now be afraid.

“Closer, coming closer —
Both the voices and the sun,
Petrooshke could swear
He has found the lament.

“He moves the quiet snow
From the screaming earth,
Suddenly, magically
A deep hell turns up.

“The whole hell —
As large as a well.
From the bleeding mire
A head pokes out.

“Higher — on a moldy board,
A moldy child swings —
A voice speaks as to an abyss,
The well is deaf and blind.



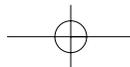
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

“The whole mighty town
Attacks the hell right away:
With Torahs, ropes, dogs,
With horses from all the stables.

“Nimbly, they climb down the ropes —
The well hits them with pieces of walls.
Booma gazes with a braid suddenly gray,
She did not recognize the sun.

“And they found Bloomka too,
But she is now a blue corpse,
Eyes eaten by the damp,
She’s the horror of the horror well.

“Her blood gave light to the dark,
Her lashes, glued by the frost.
Pulling her blond, crazy braids —
Petrooshke drags her from the deep.



MENKE

“Four days here were
One long, long night,
The darkness — a crow
Created such a world:

“A hammer builds and builds
Blind caves for itself.
A knife tells death
To kill himself by himself.

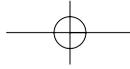
“An unborn child
Holds uncried tears,
And can see through every tear
What the days after tomorrow think.

“What a marvel led them astray —
Booma herself forgot.
She knows that longer than time itself
Death was sitting in their heart.

“And when the crumbling well
Began to pour heaps of years,
Booma tied hands to hands
And rode with Bloomka on a board.

“When the weary board
Had to split in two,
Booma held Bloomka
By a leg.

“But the loyal leg
Couldn't help for long,
On their eyes, through their hair
Spiders were crawling.



BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

“And now Booma knew for sure
That it was all too late — too late,
She embraced her fast and faster
And piously talked to her:

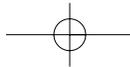
“ ‘Go, Blooma, go,
In this cold, blind ground
You will stain the snow with blood,
Be healthy in heaven.

“ ‘And soon, O good Blooma soon,
I too shall come to you! I’ll come!
And we shall stroll again in the woods
And gather stars — instead of flowers.

“ ‘For a moment, let us part.
God is here too in the abyss.
God is faster than all the trains.
We shall meet in heaven.

“ ‘With so much frost and so many demons,
How long can I stand on this board?’

— — — — —
The dead well lives to see a last kiss.
The emptiness is torn — by a final crying.



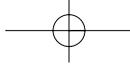
MENKE

“For such a short moment
The children say farewell,
But in the heavenly woods
They will never ever meet.

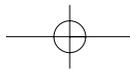
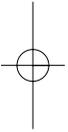
“O years, years — black birds,
Flew so far away.
Booma in her grandma days
Sits yellow, curled up.

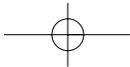
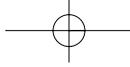
“In the frost of mid-February
She comes to Bloomka’s grave to lament,
Lamenting night after night,
Until the old grave begins to dawn.”

The children are still listening
To the finished story.
A last star freezes away
The first light calls to the road.



Eltshik





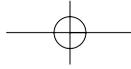
MENKE

Eltshik — the last human,
Is king and beggar of Boovitz.
He listens to a straying lament.
Hollowness rustles from the empty barns
As if they were built for tears.

Around him
Torn pages with God's names
A yellowed sunset in every letter.
Torn pages crumble and float in the air,
Looking for their lost God.

The torn pages flutter to the ruined studyhouse
And find their way back
Through the axed, green panes
And lie like patches on the pierced Tablets.

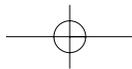
The mute pieces are all praying:
O punished God,
May at least Eltshik — the last man,
Remain in our nightmare.

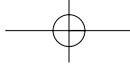


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

Boovitz grew blind,
But there is not one eye
To see the blindness.
The ruins grew deafer
But there is not one ear
To hear the deafness.

Even the Angel of Death
Strays aimlessly here
Out of boredom, breaking the bare branches,
Roaring randomly in the windy frost:
Woe! Woe!
There is no head, no foot, no tooth
Nothing to bite into —
There is no pillar, no whole roof,
No whole tree to pluck —
Go ahead, jump on your own bones!





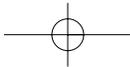
MENKE

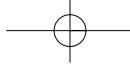
Snow.
Fresh dazzle illuminated the desolation.
So much bright fear reflected in Badonna's eyes,
So much disquiet in her weary limbs.
She smells of dust from the withering roads.
Around her, the children — oddly old.

Toward Badonna
Comes silence, moony and angry,
And the innocent snow sparkles
Like murder in the eyes of a thief.
Not even a crying remained of her Elinke.
Not a single nail, gone astray,
Not a single wound to show his anguish.

Bloomka wails the portentous calm.
For Menke, Boovitz is the gate to hell.
Even Yeiske, the unvanquished "hero"
Declared himself overcome by so much destruction.

Near the graveyard of Boovitz
Four shadowy figures plod,
As if they suddenly awoke from their graves
Hastily leaving their bodies behind.



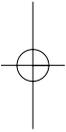


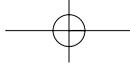
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

A snowbound house near Boovitz.
At the suspicious door
A guard chases the cold —
Beating an arm at an arm.

What or who is the guard watching?
Menke knows
They guard the empty hut
Against the ghosts of Boovitz.
He puts an eye to a crack —
The walls inside dream of windows
As a blind man dreams of eyes.

Badonna catches her breath,
As if nails choked her.
The smell of corpses tells her
That the guard watches hordes of the dead
Lest they be tempted to go home — to the graveyard.
For at dawn, preparing for the great battle
They will erect barricades of corpses.
She soon learns
That Elinke too is here — a building block for barricades.

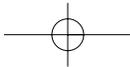


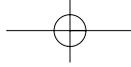


MENKE

When sleep overtook the guard,
He built the highest wall of corpses in his dream,
To block the light of eternity.
He commands
And God dissolves in the spell
And he himself becomes God.
He commands
And forests turn upside down,
The sky is earth, and the earth — sky.

The guard's dream bursts — a rotting sore.
He wakes up — God over all Gods.
Suddenly he sees the corpses move.
One corpse softly caresses another,
Caresses the fear from his body —
And mumbles:
“Eltshik, get up,
Get up, my child,
Even if you are dead.
Your father keeps America ready
With so much
Happiness.”

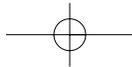


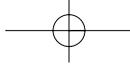
*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II*

Badonna lifts Eltshik by his stiff hands,
Menke by a foot, Bloomka by a foot,
And Yeiske — by the blond head,
As always, forward —
Through night and cold and forest:
“We m-m-m-must f-f-flee with *Elinke* f-f-f-from hell,
And he will l-l-l-live,
He has to l-l-l-live.”

From afar the guard watches
Four dead thieves
Hurrying through the forest of the night
To Michaleshik! to Michaleshik!
In their moonlight hands,
The stolen corpse sways — a living trough.

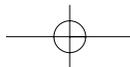
Fear becomes cold and cold becomes fear,
And the guard himself is both.

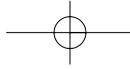




MENKE

How much lament can the silence hide,
How much blackness can the darkness see,
How much mourning can the mourning mourn?
Badonna shows, wringing her helpless hands —
over *Elinke's* grave.





BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

Back in Svintsyan.
 In the silent poorhouse
 A sunny goodness demands the madman's curses.
 At the church
 The lonely idol begs for a joyful stone —
 But there is no Meishke the Crook to answer the request.

Badonna found Berke here, a ragged thorn:
 A green cloud — over bright, springtime mires.
 He prattles with such a croaking cry,
 It seems the spirit of a frog has entered him.
 So now all are here:
 Berke, Menke, Bloomka, Yeiske,
 Even *Elinke's* not being here is also with them all.

Now Badonna's hatred can love so much:
 "Children, who would guess
 How much joy one heart can hold?
 How much sea can be mirrored in one sunny word?"

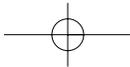
She shows the children,
 Through Father's letter, like through a magnifying glass:
 America— — — — — — — — — —America!
 A—me—ri—ca!

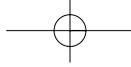


MENKE

Under the lucky ashberry tree
That fooled all the battles,
Yeiske who is six dried up springs
Sits and listens to Menke's sad story:
"Yeiske, we are not brothers.
A battlefield took away your mother.
Clutched in her dead arms,
By the cannons' glare we found you.
We are not brothers, *Yeiske*.
We are more, O much more than brothers.
We are thousand-fold brothers.

Yeiske creases his wise wrinkles on a child's forehead,
And bursts into such crying
That the "hero" is charmed out of him.
Over him, the ashberry tree flames
Like the lost blood of his mother.
He hears her voice in the restless leaves.
God plays indifferently with the mumbling tree
Mocking his tears.



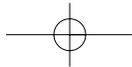


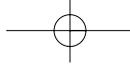
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK II

The year: One Thousand Nine Hundred and Twenty.
A wagon trundles onward to Vilna.
All around, fire tries to put out fire,
Though somewhere, they say,
The weary swords already rest in their sheaths.

Berke scares Bloomka by saying
That this good as dead horse
Can't pant its way to America.
Badonna resounds with shining laughter.
Menke and Yeiske, led by a single longing,
Fly on an invented star
And dream up the good luck destined for real brothers.

The whip dances in the carter's hand,
Cuts up dust from the grandmotherly mare.
From the other side of the mountain
The children with a last gaze
Carried Svintsyan all the way to America.





MENKE

If I am not a grandfather
When my grandchild sees the world —
A sunset will remind him
I once was.

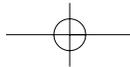
My grandson will probably laugh
Brighter than my children —
Over the breaking of smashed fences,
He will open the world's wonders.

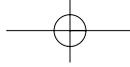
When the earth covers my sky,
The morning will bring us together —
So if I will not be a grandfather,
Let us, child, play the game of Once and Now:

You like lightning hide in the dark —
In pure mornings I shall find you.
And me, seek me out in an old book —
Through stars and fire, you'll find me.

And I shall tell you a story —
Of a time
When you could love death.
I shall tell you a story
Of such a fire
When birds burn in flight,
When seething seas scorch the seafloor,
Of a fire
That can devour the distant years,
And perhaps
O grandson of tomorrow,
You will still sweep the ash.

We beat out lava from our agony
And left it for you,
Our death — such a shining victory —
Will banish the last shadow of yesterday.



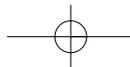
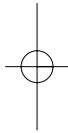
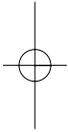


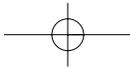
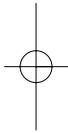
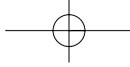
Burning Village

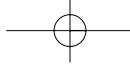
Book III

Michaleshik in America

1941

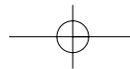
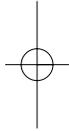
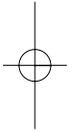


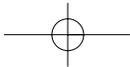
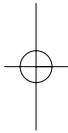
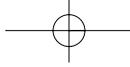


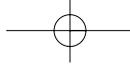


1

Heershe-Dovid







Once upon a time
I saw
Simple magic:
Yes, my father was a mirage.

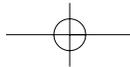
His hands
So restless:
Each hand
Filled with luckless years, did not know its fingers.

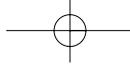
Reality — a magician Ø
O so much dream
In hard reality.
My father revealed the magic of the seven wonders:

Yes, I saw with my own eyes
Og, King of Bashan
With a heart like a tower,
Leading a host of suns through the night,
While walls of light and steel rose from earth —

Until all the heavens roared:
Truly there is such a land
With no fear — no Svintsyan
No Michaleshik — no bombs. There is such a land:
America! A! Me! Ri! Ca!

Once upon a time
I saw
Simple magic:
Yes, my father was a mirage —



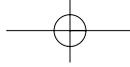


MENKE

His hands like swords
His heart on a lightning bolt Ø
Running
Through victories, a legendary rider.

A delicate today
Caressed the sick yesterday
And I suddenly heard my father's voice
Nearby, coming from a distant, conjured world.

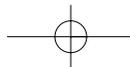
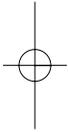


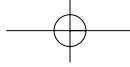


1

Kind of a Joy

There is a kind of joy, a kind of fear, at seeing a dear friend
A joy that sings from head to toe, a moment
Your senses are caught and only silence can speak.
Your blood run by primeval forces,
Every sorrow has a thousand joys.
A light pops up to aid against danger.
Unrest gnaws until you cease.
A word is ready to seduce the world into a dream.
Through your limbs, it dawns \emptyset or stars are falling.
The most distant yesterday is younger than all tomorrows.
An ear hears deaf yesterdays.
An eye sees a long-forgotten hour.
The city with its screaming steel
Reminds:
Somewhere, there are storms in tiny villages.





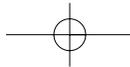
MENKE

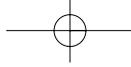
And Badonna showed her children
Wonders and miracles,
Wonders and miracles,
Not dwarfs like moths, not invented giants:
Your father Heershe-Dovid!
Your father Heershe-Dovid!

The children surrounded Badonna:
Birds met a tree in a tempest.

Berke found America
As in a story about good robbers.
He steps amazed, uncertain
As if afraid the earth would split under his feet.
If he were the captain,
Overtaken by joy, fast-fast
He would have run back to Svintsyan
Nimbly grabbing Esterka Stubun
And hiding his distraught face
In her black braids.

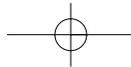
Bloomka shuffles slowly-slowly
Like an old woman curled-up threefold
And holds the bashful seam of her dress
Like a bandage on her crying eyes
And shows her childish body up to her thin, bluish waist.
Under the closed eyes, darkness dazzles.
With her covered, crying face,
She sees the blindness bright with happiness.



*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III*

Menke sees a wild forest of street signs:
A bear leads a hunter gone astray.
A wind screams over buyers,
For one dollar — ten times a scream.
Here the moon gives birth on a signboard;
Over there, a silver maiden dances through fire
And rolls the earth with fingers of flame.

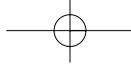
Every stone is a Purim rattle,
Every tower — whole countries.
Above — steel caves
As in the stories Eltshik used to tell...
“And with chattering and smoke, Man
Chased the stars down to earth
And lifted the earth to the place of the stars.
Not God but Man remained in Heaven
And even for angels there was enough
Bread and song and grapes.
Man stifled poverty and demons
And built his courage up to the clouds.
Man hid Genesis in his wisdom,
So time won’t grow old.”
As in the stories Eltshik used to tell:
Eltshik, O *Elinke*.
He rises from his grave with the first flowers
And walks with handfuls of breezes through the spring fields
To kiss the stalks of grains day and night,
So the bread for children will grow tastier.



MENKE

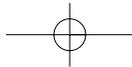
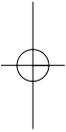
Yeiske — the “hero”
Who was not even afraid to live
Would now have crumbled the big world in little pieces,
Would have entrusted himself to terror
And let himself be led
Through lost doors
Till somewhere he’d share his life with a worm.
Around him — people:
Clouds in a hurry, sing songs of storm,
People with eyes and ears almost as in Svintsyan —
And one, tall, dark, and thin
As if he gathered darkness through the years,
A man with yearning hands,
As if raised just for hugging,
Won’t get tired
Grinding his mouth with a sore scream:
“I am your Father! I am your Father!
Your father Heershe-Dovid! Your father Heershe-Dovid!”

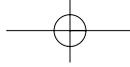
Trains chase the day underground.
At dusk the sun is a bleeding signboard
Showing the wounds of the city.
At dusk, the sun is a loose, swaying signboard
Torn by the screeching of steel, the millionfold babble.
Above Yeiske a last, dying ray
Wants to adorn death with a crown.
He hears the roar of the city, as if the world came to applaud
His ship — the three-story strongman that can vanquish the sea.

*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III*

In Heershe-Dovid's house, a tempest of uncles and aunts.
Aunt Itka is in such a rush she jumps backward,
So an evil eye, God forbid, won't steal the joy.
But Badonna and the children have glazed, indifferent eyes,
Fear in dulled gazes,
Limbs sapped by hunger and madness:
Too dark — to perceive joy,
Too bright — to see sorrow.

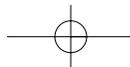
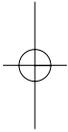
Midnight.
In the painful silence — a last echo
Seeking the vanished uncles and aunts.
The sated children dream of six years of hunger.
Heershe-Dovid shuffles from child to child,
Like a drunk dreamer from flower to flower Ø
So much pleasure in the delightful limbs.
The July calm wells up in the breeze.
Badonna and the moon incite yearning unto tears.
O what is happier than the happiest hour!





MENKE

“Tell me, Badonna, tell —
What fire swallowed up *Elinke’s* seventeen years?
Even here I heard him lamenting in my dream —
Like the swishing of a thousand whips, I heard the spring sing.
Tell me, Badonna, tell —
About your life that you carried through bullets and tears.”

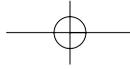


Badonna, the terrifying light of burning Lithuania
Carved on her wise, wide cheeks,
Elinke's life flaming in her frightened eyes,
Badonna, like an open book to an illiterate,
Cannot tell a thing.

She is now all warning.
She feels her bone becoming fear, her blood, fire.
That look —
There will come upon Man and everything:
War! W—a—r!
She sees yesterday in today,
As if a dead death vied with a living death
And Badonna doesn't know —
Should she cry a dirge that would deafen America?
Or should she laugh! — Laughter that would drive
Man and light and tower away in fear:

MENKE

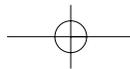
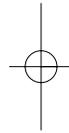
“O Heershe-Dovid, Heershe-Dovid,
The war — six Aprils of a child,
I will see it forever,
Playing with a seething earth.
I escaped all deaths
But a death that lives inside me stronger than life
Will run after me forever —
I fled from all evils
But the vanished shadow of our Elinke
Will run after me forever,
An alien haunting.
In every silence I hear his mute scream.
The fields are sown with kernels of murder,
So the fields will give birth to so much death.
Woe!
Such darkness, O what flame can scorch it!
It sinks mountains, it raises valleys! —
Till he'll pay with a head for a head!
The hangman holds the noose ready for himself.”

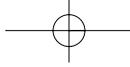


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III

On the windowpanes, Elinke's years sparkle
Like disintegrated stars.
The July night, a bright sorceress,
Carries away yesterday and today on her wings.
Badonna stays in the bright morning.

Heershe-Dovid breaks his work-worn fingernails in sorrow.
He strolls from corner to corner, from today to the past:
A distant Badonna brightens next to him.
Klezmer play a doodella for the bride.
Happy luck dances out of the drum.
The violin wailing every sorrow
Of Svintsyan, Michaleshik and Svir,
So there won't be sorrow anymore.



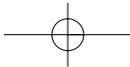
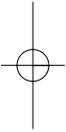


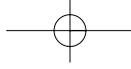
MENKE

A randy he-goat cavorts with the town fool.
Chaim-Meir of Svir has his hands full of good deeds:
“Today even a good deed
Is a sin,
Today a good deed
Is to sin against God.”
Badonna sits on the throne of happiness
And her wedding dress is woven of the moon.

Around her
Hovers the silver of angels.
The Jester travels in the best rhymes,
From Svir to New York and back.

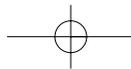
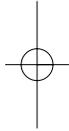
In one rhyme, seven seas are furious.
Through the clean windows you can see
Where God himself sits.
Above the polished candlesticks
The hurricane lamp gleams and shows
How much shine is in good luck!
How much shine! How much shine!

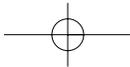
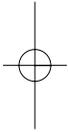
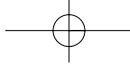


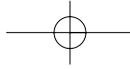


2

Lullaby for Eltshik







BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III

Towers covered with stars
The far earth, the near sky
Every brick a beautiful star,
Every star a brick on high.

Ten crowded little towns
Equal a small building,
Ten hanging bridges — a *minyên*
Of steel, never yielding.

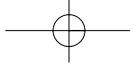
Night left its shadows behind.
Night is tasty in its bright flings.
The moon, an exiled princess
Peddles her penny rings.

Night is transformed in flame.
On each window, a legend burns wild.
With loving arms Badonna hugs
Her newborn child:

“Because you’re my last,
My child,
You must therefore be
The first and brightest.

“Let my weary body rest,
And let your soul be a fruitful dove.
Let your hatred be
A hot call for love.





MENKE

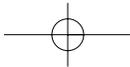
“My child, your heart shall be
A well of light.
Through you, all suns will dawn
Shining bright.

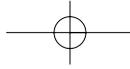
“Your every one — a lot of sun:
A grain — a field of tomorrow.
The smallest thing — a whole world,
The deep — a roof for all sorrow.

“Through you, my child, I shall
Give birth to the furthest day.
The hands of your generation
Will throw the noose away.

“As with an angry knife
That in our wounds was born
Without the wonders of God,
Cut a rose out of every thorn.

“Peel the bark off all poverty,
Saw away to the bone the sorrow of old.
Let your every moment be great and full.
Eternity itself is a short road.





BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III

“You can’t cast an evil eye
On the sun, with lucidity rife,
Yesterday’s generation
Can’t block tomorrow’s life.

“My child, you must join
The tomorrow with the yesteryear —
Let every moment live
For many, many years.

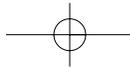
“Years of plenty, of new Torah scrolls,
Of festivity, victory, wine.
From me — through all generations
May your wide life shine.

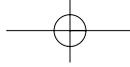
“Let the flowers be merry
Where trash carried the day.
Let crooked paths
See the straightaway.

“In the open world
Unlock every lock,
With immortal hands
Greet the new luck.

“Every man — a liberator,
Every tree — a wise regard:
From faithful depths,
From the calm of men working hard,

“Before he goes to the gallows
Man must hide away the seeds of his toil
Like a commandment
As follows:





MENKE

“Let the earth provide
Fruit and dew and gold.
Let this wish come true —
Lo and behold!”

“When life is dear, when life is long,
When world is one and deed everlasting,
When in today there is also tomorrow’s joy,
Then even dying is not so bad.

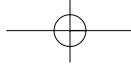
“When every end is a beginning,
The oldest time is young again —
To a distant happiness
Even death is a windowpane.”

— — — — —
“You came, my child, strong and pretty
Just as Eltshik used to be,
May you inherit his ‘sin’
But not his calamity.

“I saw his beginning path
Turn into a snake.
I heard how the wind
His grass would break.

“So you’re destined, it seems
To carry *Elinke’s* name,
Through you may our dead *Elinke*
Live again.

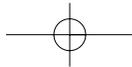
“Once I will call you Eltshik,
Ten times I will call you *Elinke* —
Then he will live in you, my child,
And be healing balm for the sick world.”

*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III*

Our Father Heershe-Dovid saw two *Elinkes*
Today in his dream:
The dead *Elinke*, sleepwalking with distant hands
Whispered words from the restless grass:
“Once I shone like the wheat field the enemy burned.
Once I was the molten burn of a bullet
And my sleep lay on the points of crushed glass.
Now I live, Father, Father I live!
I fly on wings of fire!
I’m a rock swayed by cannon roar.
I’m a storm vanquished by a breeze.”

When father said farewell to him in a dream,
The new *Elinke* met the dawn
With tiny hands full of joy,
With animal prattle, like scattered words in a dream.
And the newborn fingers shone toward father
Like new hands of a watch, showing the road of all roads.

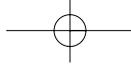
Father Heershe-Dovid sees in reality
Elinke who died is again newborn,
And now his first-born is also the youngest:
He’s magic, a cradle of light from a lost twilight.
From a lost sun, he collects ray after ray.
He’s magic
As if in the jackals’ desert he struck flowing springs.



MENKE

Bloomka shouts a song
The way Aunt Itka taught her:
“Mama gave birth to a brother —
Ri! Ra! Ri!
May he live for many-many years!
Ri! Ra! Ri!
Let his luck be as big as Hill of Svir —
Ri! Ra! Ri!
His nights filled with light
Enough to cover the days with stars:
Ri! Ra! Ri!
Ri! Ra! Ri!”

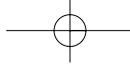
And the children in the happy school
Yearned more than learned —
Yearned with a gnawing heart for hungry Svintsyan,
Yearned with the fear of a howling Michaleshik
When emperors shrank on their thrones,
When God himself hid in attic spider webs,
Hid from the cannons of murder.
And the children in the happy school had
Their eyes full — of Michaleshik and tears.

*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III*

Yiske built a house deep in thought:
Of chips and pebbles and dreams.
A painted dawn blues though the mossy walls,
God Himself on a weary camel rides in a painting,
And His heart aches for His people Israel.
On the hinges, abandoned doors rust.
Over the straw roof, instead of a chimney
A lonely lantern is smoking.

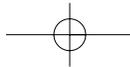
In the lantern, a candle, a paraffin eye
Is blinking the mire of grief,
That used to lead to Meishe-Benyomin's *cheider*.
Here yearning is a closed gate to an eager world.
Here yearning is a little window gilded by a penny candle.
Here yearning is the last sunset of Michaleshik.

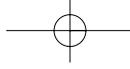
And facing the ferment of light and squares,
Yiske told so many stories:
Stories of parks, birds and rabbits —
How giants, humans and stars
Met a legend.
Stories of an imprisoned lot
Set free by friendly death:
Of a hanged man who escaped from the noise,
Of an ice prison that chose spring for its guardian.

*MENKE*

Through the scream of stone, the shimmer of insolent steel,
Menke looks for the end of the walls, as if he created them.
The broad avenues dwindle into narrow paths
At the sight of the loving past.
Through the magic of longing
He sees a tower turns to a heap of pebbles.
Out of all alien street screams, one single word
Remains dear to his lips:
Michaleshik, O faraway frightened flicker!

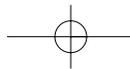
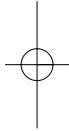
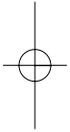
The fires of a thousand Broadways will not obstruct you,
And the heroes, the towers, cannot vanquish your weak huts
Nor vanquish my childhood that endures,
Clutching at you with the nails of poverty.
My grandfather Aaron-Velvel, your richest man,
Famous all the way from Svintsyan to Svir,
Had a thin rooster, a proud dream, and a couple of sad goats.
Michaleshik, you beautiful grandmother's tale,
The "Dandy in a Bowler" will never like you.
In a dream, even eternity dwindles to a little corner,
Facing you.

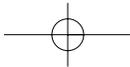
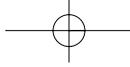


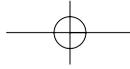


3

Berke the House Painter Dreams



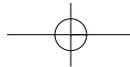


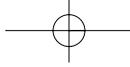


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III

Dusk.
Hard work brought home a used up day.
Berke's day — hanging on scaffold ropes.
As many moments — so many dangers.
Death is an empty place with luring vises.
Wholeheartedly entrusting himself to the rigging,
He sees Michaleshik floating in America
Above an abyss.
O scaffold, please do not cheat me!

A flower smiles in his jaunty lapel.
He cherishes the wisdom of hard work.
A resounding well spring whispers secrets to him.
Today he chased the dark from squinting walls.
With brush and colors he hurled rays today,
And now a divine light plays in his hands,
As if he painted the night with sun.



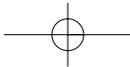
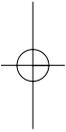


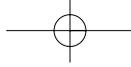
MENKE

The affluent evening caresses him
Like a heavenly rich man
Who gives every beggar a palace of gold,
A sleigh with common sense and a path of butter.

Every cool shadow reminds him
Of Esterka's blossoming braid,
Platted into bushes of every flower —
A braid reminiscent of a fine night in Svintsyan
When a wedding of stars flew down
And little puffs of wind danced around them.

Berke ponders:
“After fifty-three years, how much till seventy is left?
A week divides into seven.
A day into twenty-four.
Even one moment must divide into something.
A year divides into — O-Ho-Ho!
Ay, into how much can fifty-three years divide,
When every moment is — making a living, a living, a living!
Ay, if a million is little, how much is much?”

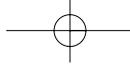


*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III*

Across from Berke, in the rundown courtyard
Last crumbs of night climbed on the rust
And lit up the dead generations.
He sees even rust can hope.
The glimmer of gold spreads wide on his thought
And a flighty dream spreads in his limbs:
How noble is the silver of every dime.
How strong the copper of every cent —
From such copper he forges walls,
Windows — from newly minted dimes,
The ceiling — of mirroring gold —

Gold, he collects a whole sun
And with a round hand, he writes
To Esterka *Stubun*, back in small town Svintsyan:
“Pretty bride, Esterka *Stubun*,
I love you so much
That I already got a palace,
Half sun, half moon —
A world, half dreams, half birds.
Here, a learned night knows
How to open up, so stars rain down.
Here, a wise rooster knows
When to cleverly crow and when to be dumb.

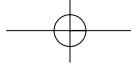
“Pretty bride, Esterka *Stubun*:
If such a long way scares you,
I order the sea to disappear!
I order all distances to disappear!
An obedient moment will bring you here!”



MENKE

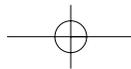
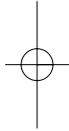
Berke sees in a dream, Esterka *Stubun*
 Illuminates his letter with a happy tear.
 The letter with no ink, no paper, writes itself facing him:
 “— When the earth climbs here to the sky,
 My palace is in the sky.
 Happy dreams play on the windowpanes.
 Through the curtains, breezes laugh.
 The proud tables mock bread, even challah.
Teigalach in honey and jam are frying in such exquisite tastes
 That God Himself orders a meal.

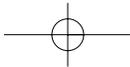
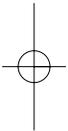
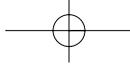
“Even time is tasty to your gullet.
 Every hour — a wild drink, every breeze — a singer.
 A hundred servants and a thousand maids
 Waiting in starry hats at the gates of Paradise,
 Seek you in a thousand windowpanes.
 From subservient heads to nimble fingers,
 Every servant will praise you —
 Whisper softly, roar:
 Make way! Make way!
 For the Princess — Esterka *Stubun!*
 For Esterka *Stubun* — the Princess!”

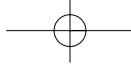


4

Father in the Silk Factory





*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III*

Father Heershe-Dovid carries beautiful dawn
Into the eternal night of the silk factory.
So many sinful days can't be banished all at once,
And the bridge of good deeds is not yet ready
To take him to paradise.

Father Heershe-Dovid, moulded from smoke and color
In the eternal night of the silk factory,
Invented by a dreamer, an alchemist,
Forever to bathe silk into rivulets of color
So the silk turns in rustling rainbows,
Strides high and thin and weary
Through frosty rooms where winter has found a home.

Through hot rooms,
As if all his summers were roasting there,
In his heavy boots over the flooded floors,
He's a weary soldier seeking his way through thick swamps.
In his gigantic rubber apron,
Like an actor on stage, an imaginary chef,
Feeding the silk with greedy colors.

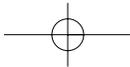
Machines drive — steel days
And the silk swallows it all:
Good springs and evil frosts.
Silk swallows all:
Steel days and bone and skin from pieces of fingers.
Riding on stripes of gasping silk,
Dazzling death — so close and clear.

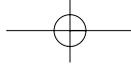


MENKE

Father Heershe-Dovid in the eternal night of the silk factory
Dreams up a fantastic forest,
The trees laden not with leaves but with his days.
Every bare tree, a screeching fool,
Screams the scream of the factory.
Every full tree made of raisins, honey and strudel
Climbs to an alien master,
Not recognizing its maker.

And in the forest he sees — not made of all kinds of birds
But of flying silk — a color concert.
The machines, like cynical robbers, applaud.
And every silk is painful.
Delicate silk has teeth, poisonous eyes,
Weary brains Ø A serpent muzzle.
To suck.

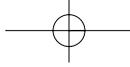


*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III*

On the eve of Judgment Day,
Father Heershe-Dovid sees the factory walls —thin
And transparent — till the end of his days.
And the distant windowpanes are to him
As to a boy in love, the stars.

Now in the factory noise he hears
The rustling sorrow of the Stratsha,
The watermill in the forest outside of Svir.
And now he is indifferent
To the factory's storming wheels
As if a pious silence fills his ears.

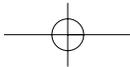
Before his longing eyes,
Smarting like a wound — the town of Svir.
He sees his father, the miller, in paradise:
The old watermill grinds mountains of sins,
Even of flowers, stars and saints.
His father the Miller whispers piously
From paradise, like a praying stalk:
“Come, my child,
My child, come,
Part from the superfluous body.
East of Eden is our town Svir,
Every thorn is a wing.
Every little windowpane is a sky.”

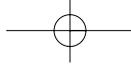


MENKE

Heershe-Dovid sees “God’s Finger” drive the factory wheels.
His heart pounds all the dangers of the Chapter of Curses.
Like a bleeding wheel, earth rolls in hell,
But his soul smells the aromas of paradise orchards,
And everything points to the miracles of his guests — the forefathers:
Machines scream like Jews in a thousand markets.
Chimneys lament like wounded giants.
Not boys around the oven — an amazed circle,
But rushing — steel gone wild
Tells stories of robbers.

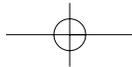
Not from Svir — the sorcerer Turk,
But crafty silk would know the magic
Sorcerers performed in storybooks.
A silk factory longer than Svir,
Wider even than Svintsyan!
Not on earth but in the stars
Row on row of huts!

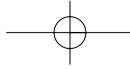


*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III*

A day went.
A day with wheezing wind, with steel space
Mad with the scream of silk machines.
Its sky walled in by the high walls.
The bright hours left in the dazzle of silk.
Silk in colors of nightingales, stars and grass.
O sweating sun, set in his tired body,
Lies angrily now in every vein and mourns
Its extinguished life.

Badonna in her tasty kitchen
Inhales a thousand tastes of invented marzipans.
Her master's hand sparkles in her every move,
Her bun of brown hair freshly washed.
She listens to the sinful talk of perfect frying pans:
Potato *kneidalach* argue — pota-pota-pota,
We're so good, we chew on ourselves —
And the angry lentils answer with tasty tears:
Len-len-len, we've had our fill of Esau.
And sweet-sour, winy beets turn red,
Too shy to speak.

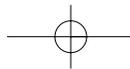


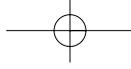


MENKE

The prepared table, as if standing in a singing orchard.
Every evening, Heershe-Dovid is king, Badonna queen.
All around in a garland — the pretty children:
Berke, Menke, Bloomka, and the New *Elinke*
Who doesn't understand anything about the dream of stories,
And Michaleshik is strange to him — wonder of wonders.

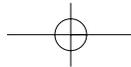
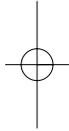
When the supper hour departs with a thrill of thrills,
And your heart enjoys the sated fullness,
Yeisinke's empty place gnaws
And father misses Yeiske singing *zmires*.
The saddest word is sounded in silence
On the lips of Badonna.

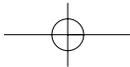
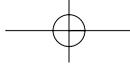


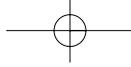


5

**A Quiet Little Room on the
Lower East Side**





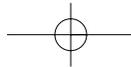


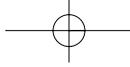
BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III

A quiet little room — in roaring New York.
Here, Yeiske knows
How much space an hour can long for,
How much darkness can love the evening,
How much restlessness the wind remembers.
Yeiske knows
How many shadows a candle can write on the ceiling,
With how much gloom stayed here yesterday,
With how much gloom will stay tomorrow.

The walls, sooty sentries,
Keep the sun from taking one step in here
But do not keep out poverty and blizzards
The gray cubicle in shimmering metropolis.

The bricks yearn to crumble.
The days forget the color of light.
Sometimes, eternal night scares a moonbeam,
Sometimes the crooked shine of a wayward star.



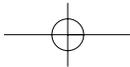


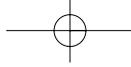
MENKE

Through long nights of ruins, winter
Is the conductor of moonfrost and windsong
The duel against his shuddering panes.
Yeisinke's teeth chatter.
The candle, a conquered fire
Hurries to extinction.
The flickering flame in the wind likes death,
For there is no time to think about life.

The snow radiates the blind windowpanes,
In a play of light — a gruesome flirtation.
Yeiske senses how the thin light
Tries to lift the heavy darkness.

Through the corners of the bent roof,
Winter melts in rusty tears,
Quells the sated dust
In thirsty cracks.



*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III*

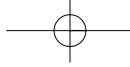
Spring makes the shadows of the curious sunset blossom.
The candle is a tiny, fading meteor.
The old chair sighs a sick birdsong.
A dream in a painting breaks out of the narrow frame.

The silence hears the sinking of the walls.
Old wood dreams of a young saw,
Of lighting up the cold oven.
But the saw has not arrived
And the oven remains a useless dummy.

The loose bricks call for strong hammers,
Imagine falling in a joyful abyss.
But the strong hammers have not arrived
And the sickening height is greedy hope for the abyss.

Yeiske hears the spring speak:
O window of the night, you seek the sun in vain.
O limping table, you'll never stand straight.
You'll never grow back to be green forest.

All around
Like a ghost of ruins, the poorhouse of Svintsyan
Rummages in vain for luck in the clouds.
There's so much longing in his cubicle,
As if his hut stood on the Hill of Svir.

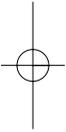


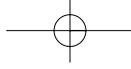
MENKE

The house, a crumbling giant
Stands blind and crooked.
With just a belt of the sun, it's hard
To cheer the windows — the dusty eyes.

In the place of the ruins, Yeiske can hear
A heroic forest resound:
The birds, the songs, the mighty trees —
Man drove it out, once upon a time.

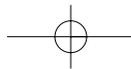
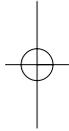
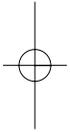
In place of the gray cubicle
An eagle's nest is hanging.
Now the day is the last glimmer
Of a sun that long ago declined.

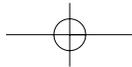
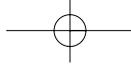


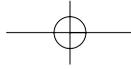


6

Shouts of Pogroms





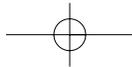
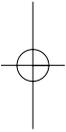
*BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III*

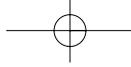
“Always thoughtful, Dinah,
Always tearful Dinah:
Why
Do I see a sad sunset in your blond hair?
Why
Do I see an old night in your sixteen sunny years?”

“Always original Yeiske,
Always wondering Yeiske:
A bloodstained snow crossed my summers.
I saw the hidden knife
Engraving the first crease in a child’s forehead.
I know
A spark in a frozen oven is brighter than all dreams.
A drop of anguish is greater than a sea of joy.
I know
A step of death is faster than all winds.

“I see rifles — lightning in a dark forest —
But exploding bullets are rays
To light the way for victorious death.
Around me, soldiers erect a wedding canopy
Which is an orgy of swords.
A terrified tree rocks my torn dress on a branch.
I hear a last scream, the ominous hovering of crows.
I see a robbers’ night shining with open wounds,
Lighting up the fears of the rest of my life.

“So much fear has not yet pierced my limbs.
From so much night, my eyes are not yet blind.
I’m a wreath of springs under moldy moss.
My every today is caught by a yesterday.
I see the sun in the evening as a head before slaughter.



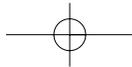


MENKE

“Through long, sleepless nights
I’m awake alone with my consoling death,
I sense every wheel of the city above me.
I hear in every breeze an echo of distant weeping,
In every murmur a gruesome secret.
My years are cut up branches longing for fire.
Through grinding darkness, I leap up and laugh crazily,
And laughter is flaming shrapnel through my limbs.

“Long, sleepless nights remind me of people condemned to death:
Evenings — blood-covered hangmen,
Rays — brothers fencing
As if the limbs of one body were the other’s foes.
Every sunrise — a winning battle.
Every sunset — a losing battle.
Battle! Battle! Battle!”

In Yeiske’s room — writhing silence.
Silence, like the unheard lament of a deaf mute.
Dinah sees crown after crown fall in the dust,
Sees her little brother in the butcher’s hand —
Trembling body, screaming to the sword:
“Ma-ma!”
Who hid inside me the sins of an evil man?
Not yet dead — and already in heaven!”
Choked by the hand of a hangman,



Dinah continues:

“Yeiske always in love!

Yeisinke always daydreaming!

My words are as black as the fear of pogroms.

Today I met my dead little brother on Broadway.

Aaron-Ber with his seven knifed years

Showed me

Just a ball of bloody hair remained of him.

My dead little brother — in the glimmer of Broadway

Lamented on a beggar’s violin

That he has no eyes

To show the tears of his generation,

That somewhere he left behind the wounds and the dark,

And here he’s all light

So much light, you can’t see the rays,

As if his unborn days devoured all nights

And left so much Day

That you start to yearn for another little corner of dark.

Here he is, all dance,

As if ghosts assaulted him with so many dances

That he wants to go back

To the little path of rest — under cemetery grass.

Here he is all Today,

So much Today, you can’t remember Yesterday.

“And today I met my dead little sisters on Broadway:

One who was two days old just asked her name,

Hurled a newborn curse,

That she doesn’t have even one the tiniest baby bone

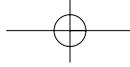
To show me where the knife cut,

And with ghostly hands she waved goodbye.

MENKE

The second one, Pesha-Libka, burning on a tower pane,
Murmured with the voice of a breeze:
'Not with death, with my living four years
I fled my distant grave
And came to you with no head, no body,
To bring you the silk towel
That choked my Jewish throat,
For Tzechanowicz, with his noble heart,
Couldn't hang me on a simple rope.'

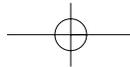
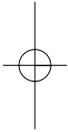
"Today —
I met three dead infants on Broadway:
Sand and rain devoured their bodies,
And the wounds winked from all the street signs.
And I
With dark bowed head, facing towers of light,
Sat shiva in the middle of Broadway
And whispered softly like this:
Dead infants — Woe! Woe!
You must have forgotten
That not in a dream
But on Broadway
You came to me.
And there are no graves here
And no grass,
So how can I leave you
Cemetery shadows among the fires of signs?
And how will I rock you to sleep?
No little white goat
Only the false screams about bargains.
Your grief can quench all Broadways.

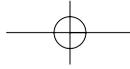


BURNING VILLAGE – BOOK III

“At the first step of towering dawn,
Through the thunder of steel I heard a laugh:
‘Ha-Ha-Ha, Dinah!
Ha-Ha-Ha, Dinah!
Ha-Ha-Ha, Ha-Ha-Ha!
Ha-Ha-Ha, Ha-Ha-Ha!’
On Broadway — voices of pogroms:
Of tortured infants — a chorus.
On Broadway
Dead little sisters, escaped from distant graves.

A two-day-old sister without a name.
A little sister choked with a silk towel.
And a little brother — a handful of bloody hair:
‘Ha-Ha-Ha, Dinah!
Ha-Ha-Ha, Dinah!
Ha-Ha-Ha, Ha-Ha-Ha!
Ha-Ha-Ha, Ha-Ha-Ha!’”





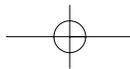
MENKE

With the rays of loving words
The dingy room began to dawn.
With Yeiske, blond joy
Can drive out snake, raven, hangman!

“O Dinah, a heart embraces a heart,
And the hundred-year-old building is all magic.
See, the table, limping and crooked,
Straightens itself out.

“O Dinah, a modest step toward you —
And a moldy board becomes a fresh branch.
The touch of a hand —
And faded wood becomes a forest in spring.

“O Dinah, how much light in your eyes —
Moldy grief driven out by a fragrant song,
Darkness, the ancient enemy
Choked in the interwoven arms.
O every dawn can only love,
And I rise toward you with the victory of dawn!
O Dinah,
From shore to shore, I see the cursed night on fire.
O Dinah,
I see so many radiant hands heal your wounds.”



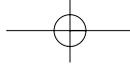
The Brave Coward

(Original version published in the *Fraybayt*, August 14th 1938)

1

About Joy and Sadness

The coward forever fears darkness
 And forever mugs the dream in a dark alley
 And twists 'I am holy' and brays 'I am right':
 "Hey, poet, over here — rays
 Of light enough for generations of nights.
 Hey, poet, over here, happiness
 For sad slaves.
 Time has choked the yesterdays
 And tomorrows for sickly idlers.
 Over here! The today!
 A savory today, filled like orchards with sweet-scented sap.
 Cemetery fear stares out from your poem's starry eyes.
 Your poem is a mouldy path to a mouse hole.
 Don't stick your sadness in our upbeat wheels."
 Oho, brave coward, your drumming call
 Would surely wake a trembling rabbit from its nap,
 But I will not lead my poem into battle –
 My poem with its straw body,
 Even if ignited a thousand times red –
 How can one move mountains with the might of straw?
 How can you scare the mighty foe,
 Even if he chains himself?
 Your word — a gnat with a fantastic fist
 Demands joy — big as a stick,
 What can be sadder than that?
 A tempest of gray talk,
 What can be grayer than that?
 A tempest of gray talk –
 Who can hear the end of it?
 With a heart of steel, with calm blood,
How can one swear an oath?!

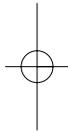


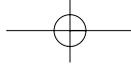
MENKE

2

On Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

O brothers of yesterday, O sisters of tomorrow,
My heart swears, my blood swears:
Fearsome teeth will not claw you up.
The coward's whip will not touch you.
With heart and blood I will defend you.
The sadness of age will forever keep the wine young.
The most distant tomorrow will forever
Embrace the most distant yesterday,
Will forever shine through the magic of the nearest today.



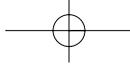


3

And You're Sad As A Thousand Coney Island Suns

Your rage — a fire giant,
Enough to burn away the sadness of a little fly,
If only your hatred could scratch out the eye of a foe,
If only your flame could
Heat a frozen hut.
Your word bursts like a deluge of light —
Enough to flood the nights,
Enough to polish generations of shoes with its beams.
But I get dark-dark from so much light
And so I get sad-sad from so much happiness.
All your joy can scare me
As in a storybook about once-once —
In Mikhalishek at night in the cemetery,
A Golem with a voice turned clear,
With a face of a ghost
And dressed in shrouds
Used to do a hopka to wake the dead.

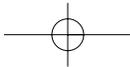
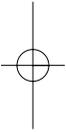
Because you are sad as a thousand Coney Island suns
Your joy is sadder than all sadness.
Because the poet's sadness can be more joyful than all joy
My days found so much sadness,
As darkness can shine in a true poem,
There is also darkness in my happiness.

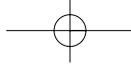


MENKE

I give you all the rivers from flooding faucets,
I take a drop — pensive dew.
I give you all the rainbows of word rockets,
Of all the fires — I take a single spark.
And I so love
To walk through all the darknesses —
A single spark,
And I so love
To be myself the light that dispels the gloom around me.

I saw
A fear dispel the blindness.
I saw
A spark block all the fires,
A sunset rise as dawn,
An autumn for thorns to blossom.
I saw
The most beautiful bird
Lives off a worm.
And I will not be afraid like the coward
To strip my work naked even in a mouse hole.





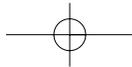
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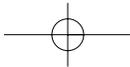
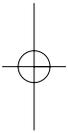
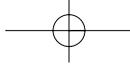
The Prayer of a Drum

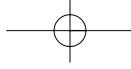
“Woe,” screams the tin of a drum,
“How shall I conjure up the clouds,
So that not the rain but the hail
Of hard words will drum in me.

“Come, O sadness, come, O beloved, come,
For my joy is different without you,
As fragrant darkness in an open field
Differs from condemned darkness in a death cell.

“O mournful flute,
Give me a darkness that haunts the lucid light —
A light all-encompassing unto darkness.
O, give me a joy dismaying unto tears,
A joy, a mournful flute
That lifts up the depths
And carries them up to longing heights.
O, give me anguish that makes the gray day a holiday.

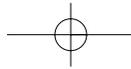
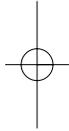


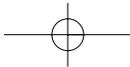
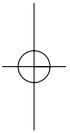
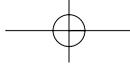


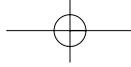


*Grandmother Mona
Takes the Floor*

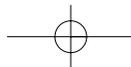
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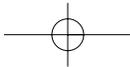
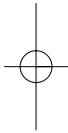
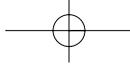


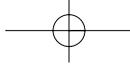




**Once Upon a Time
There Was a Story**





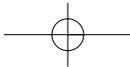


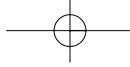
I am Grandmother Michaleshik.
At my mother's breast, I sucked
The fiery fear of *Burning Village*.
I am Grandmother Want, bent over a women's prayer book.

I am Grandmother Want:
The heart of a blue infant in dazzling frost.
My fear is —
Hirshe-Leib Tarshish hanging in a noose of *tefillin*.
My fear is —
A mocked tallis on a dog's tail
Before the ruined Ark of a defiled prayer house
He goes out in a ghostly barking.

I am Grandmother — The Past,
Only God can speak from so far.
If my days are rust, total rust,
Time has bloodied the rust.

I am dead, dead for generations.
But through my grandchildren, I am the deadliest rage
Against Haman and Torquemada.
I am Night, night for generations.
But wearing the wounds of my people,
I am all red flag,
I am the dawning day
That will banish ghost and dark and want.





MENKE

Once upon a time there was a story:
A smoke-filled hut, built of clouds.
On the earthen floor — extinguished sky.
In the nearby cemetery, Death dwells —
A body of grass, a heart of mould.

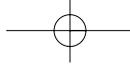
The clouds travel to a black Nowhere,
Meet the enemy — the distant glee.
The eternal heights in the windows show
How eternal-eternal our love will be.

The cricket never tires of sawing the hours.
A gloomy grass under a stone
Sprouts to ask
Is it summer in the world?
It hears in the crickets' dirge its own.

My father is dozing, clutching my dress,
So I cannot flee to my beloved.
And I am still in the dream of his words:
O my bride,
Who can buy a silver sliver of the moon?
And I shall take all the silver of the moon
And give it a gift to you, my lover.
The smallest fly has an hour with God and the stars,
And for a day and a night we will hover in eternity.

Our love is endless — endless,
But, alas, my bride, alas,
Even endlessness comes to an end.
Witness the fear in the cemetery grass.

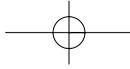
Hear the choking wind in the chimney
Reminding of people who were hung,
See on a windowpane in the dusk,
Me and you — generations that passed long ago.

*GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR*

O my bride:
I saw tomorrow's Tomorrow
Sprouting
From the beloved earth —
It was on the eve of spring.
I heard it whisper through every little leaf:
"I am the drunkenness of unfinished wine.
Through pitch dark, I am destined
To find
The lost dawn.
"But alas, my bride, alas —
Even the springiest springs will yellow,
And ice will shine on the dead suns,
The distant Tomorrow will be a distant Yesterday.

"The eternal light will not brighten eternity.
Man will gather
The imaginary crop of a mythical field.
At the End of Days, there will be left
Of a former evening — the past Nothing."

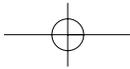
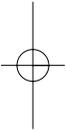
My father is dozing, clutching my dress,
And I am still in the dream of his words:
Hush, my bride, hush, my dear,
In such a bright hour,
Uncle Snowman is here —
So much dazzle cures the sick dark.
Hush, my bride, hush
Uncle Snowman explains
Our love is brighter than all shining light —
But alas, my bride, alas and woe,
The brightest death is the brightest snow.

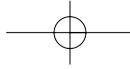


MENKE

— — — — —

My hut is poor, my hut is gray.
A finger of sun — a ring of sadness
The size of a crushed rose —
Circles around me.
But thanks and praise God
My heart is not poor, my heart is not gray.
See on the patched up panes
Such a magical night has emerged —
A night with birds,
With wind, with fluttering wonder,
With light enough to dawn in the first hour.
O if only my grandson had
More refreshments for his guests,
More airy windows for the stars.

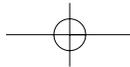
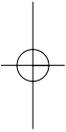


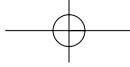


GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR

Under the merriest fire, there are gloomy ashes.
In a dream the tree sees itself as a cleansing board for the dead.
And the branches scream in the wind in chorus
When the woodcutter speaks of the beautiful forest.

In a spring forest there is more weeping
When love calls the migrant birds in
And birth bears its buoyant scream.
The trees rise to the heights
As if they rose to fly.
The spring forest in green anguish:
“Woe! Woe!
The woodcutter says I am beautiful!”



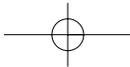
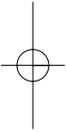


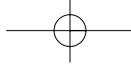
MENKE

Hear what the storm tells:
There are good deeds that sin even in Heaven.
Because of them, beauty hobbles on crutches.
There are transgressions that do not sin even in Hell —
Because of them, Hell is the flute that wails the most.

As hunger yearns to be sated,
So the sated yearns for hunger.
The sea longs for the thirst of the desert
As the desert longs for the waters of the sea.

The rain will never banish the dust.
The shadow will never part from the light.
There must be night in the West, and night and night,
Before dawn begins in the East.



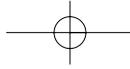


GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR

Hear what the storm tells:
The thunder was destined
To scream the anguish of the stammerer —
Hence so much silence in the thunder,
So much thunder in resolute silence,
But woe to the stammerer who wants to scream like thunder.

From a rushing train, all roads are trains —
The wailing wind resounds like distant steel.
Through the speeding windows,
Every place is a flying hoop.
Fields lift bands of rams in a dizzying run —
From a rushing train, all rams are trains.
But woe to the ram who wants to rush like a train.

Hear what the storm tells:
The ferocity of uncaulked windowpanes
And the raging shutters in battle with the wind
Cannot carry a wintry home to the spring.



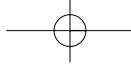
MENKE

God willing, later
I shall tell you the most beautiful old wives' tale
About an uncle made of snow,
Whose head is ten mountains, whose legs are a thousand caves.

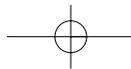
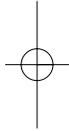
Meanwhile, you will hear a simple tale,
Of a gray chip that swore like this:
I am all the silver of the stars,
I am the storm, I am the red banner.

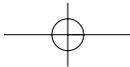
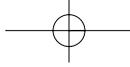
Meanwhile, you will hear a simple tale
Of a straw that trumpets:
I shall block the fire in the wind,
As a little goat bleats, I am older than my mama,
As a little mud puddle snorts, I am the sea:

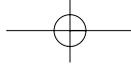




The Little Giant





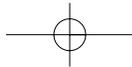
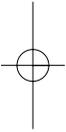


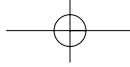
GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR

Grandmother Mona:

There is a kind of red, my child,
The violated blood of my grandchildren—
Of such a red and of a night of graves,
The bad guy spins a banner,
His banner a bloody whip,
His banner a noose in the bad guy's hand.
With his banner he chokes my dead neck.

O Haman of Ahasuerus's days is Haman in Michaleshik's days.
In his noble top hat, in his snappy tuxedo,
He is the slaughterer of the secular slaughterhouse.
For so many generations, he tears my shrouds,
And with tatters of the holy cloth
He closes the sun away from my people.
The gleam that he brings is the gleam of guillotines —
O Haman's light!
And the axe shines
Over my martyred grandchildren,
And the axe shines
Over the last limbs of your dead Grandmother Mona.



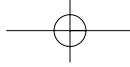


MENKE

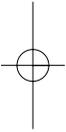
There is a kind of red, my child,
As buoyant as the first sunrise —
Pure as Genesis is pure of sin,
A red fluttering over eternity — our banner,
A red as alive as the death of Rabbi Akiva.
A red that X-rays your blood like lightning
And sets the heart off on its magical walk.

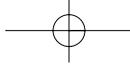
And there is a kind of red, my child,
That cannot be a banner
As a loose tooth cannot be a sword.
A kind of red, my child,
That sickens the stomachs of the strongest,
A red pinched from the sole of a foot to color a false word,

A kind of red, such a little giant —
He grows not from the rain, not from the sun.
A little giant — Oho, Oho!
Against me, as against the enemy, he carries
A skunk of ink, a cursed rifle on his “brave” shoulder —
Surely not out of well-being did I feel like dying,
And not a festive gravestone but an ordinary little board
Recounts my simple pedigree:

*GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR*

Here lies good Grandmother Mona —
May She Rest in Peace, May She Rest in Peace.
May she hear David's harp in every breeze,
May the Prophet Elijah appear in her dreams.
Her good deeds are countless as the stars.
Not in vain did she heal the belly
Of every sick chicken in the poor synagogue yard.
Not in vain, did she wash the linen
Of the poorhouse, from dawn to night,
And recite incantations against the evil eye
For the empty begging sacks.
She would mourn with our sunsets.
She would hope with our dawns.
Through whip and wailing,
She dragged the gall of our daily life.
With her last breath,
She melted the frost on our windowpanes.
O not in vain will she rise there, There,
To speak for us in Heaven high, High,
And He who lives for ever, Ever —
If not the front door of Heaven,
At least a back door
For her may He hold open, Open.”

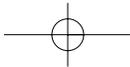


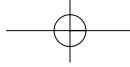


MENKE

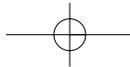
A Red, such a little giant,
A little giant — Oho, Oho! —
Broke the little grave marker of my long lineage
Over your head, child,
And did not even
Pierce his sinful heart.

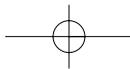
A Red, such a little giant,
A little giant — Oho, Oho! —
Calls my shrouds, my desolate winters: Aunt Tilly,
When you're named for me and my hard working line.
The watermill of Stratsha still remembers
The honest seeds of rye
Of my grandfathers, the millers whitened by flour
Whose toil brought the scent of fields all the way to Vilna.



*GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR*

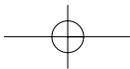
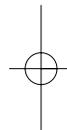
So what,
If unlike him,
I asked the time
Of the good sun and the proud rooster,
If just like him, I wrote with three dots?
So what,
If with a pale red as of fading poppy blooms,
He can shrivel over the joy of tomorrow's roads,
That unlike me, he can tell
Grandmother's tale of the prankster, the bear
In the bathhouse of Pig Street,
Where on the hottest floor,
With Urke's cobbler's awl,
They extracted ten laughing little humans
From the bear's belly,
So what,
That with an whole tempest, he can buzz out half a breeze,
That unlike me,
He can dance in a sunny circle with dirty-faced grandchildren,
That unlike me,
He can love the wounded depths of his race.

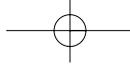




MENKE

In infant dawns,
My muddy longing is for Michaleshik and Svintsyan —
The full blue of a springtime dream.
In infant dawns,
My past is a child:
The cool dew on overheated fields.
Through the steel song of brand-new cities,
My past is the zest of every builder's hand,
The impetus of a new train,
Taking off for the first time.



*GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR*

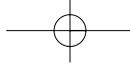
A Red, such a little giant,
A little giant — Oho, Oho!
In front of his holiest flag, he proclaims
That not he but Aunt Tilly was
The most freakish spider dressed up in shrouds.
In front of his holiest flag, he proclaims:
Not her life — an angel ripped apart by a demon,
But her good deeds have become limping beings.
He points at graveyard creatures running after her:
Sick moons, twisted magic hoops,
A mouth biting into graveyard shadows.
In front of his holiest flag, he proclaims:
Her godfearing nails are a nightmarish spear
To torture all that is red:
Red — such a little giant,
A little giant — Oho, Oho!

O my brave, my tenfold brave grandchildren!
O my thousandfold brave grandchildren!
You, who will not stick their head like Mordechai
Under a sack with ash,
Be tenfold proud, be a thousandfold proud
Of all the good old-fashioned Aunt Tillies.

MENKE

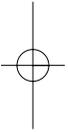
A Red — such a little giant,
A little giant — Oho, Oho!
He dressed you up, my child
With a “poisonous, red-eater” face.
He hid his lie under the pious banner,
And with a word that smells of a jackal’s blood,
Against you (Foo on my enemies),
Through my chewed up skeleton
He blew such a caterwauling:

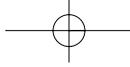
“Hey Meow-ow, meow-meow-ow
Meow-ow, meow-ow, Menke Cats,
It’s not olden times,
When you made believe,
In a heroic Russian shirt on Red Square
That you came with our voice
To roar “Revolution!”
Made believe you heard Lenin’s word
With your blocked ears,
Made believe you aimed at the enemy
And fast as a nervous bat fearing light
With poetic wings you turned back
To the three sisters — your beloved taboos.



GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR

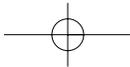
“And then,
Hiding in your own torture chamber
You’d clutch your head on rusty nails —
To shove aside the international struggle
In a crack of a rusty hinge,
To wrap the generations’ spasms
In a spiderweb veil.

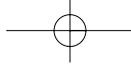




MENKE

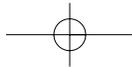
On chop-suey wisdom and poisonous wines,
You could stick out your tongue at the red banner
And the main thing the main thing,
Sing passacaglias against me and against Lenin,
For Introspectivist worms and Fascists to have enough
Dirty fire to burn our pure truth —
Just so that “darkness shines in the true poem”
Hey, Meow-ow meow-ow.





GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR

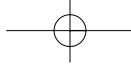
“Hey, meow-ow meow-ow
Meow-ow meow-ow Menke Cats
You with your damp workshop of graveyard moss
At the mouse hole carpeted with mould
I am I am I am
The Red Red Red singer
Of a Red hare of Red hair of a Red nose
You you you, a Denmark spider
A worm gone mad
Digging a bed for himself maggoty-soft
When I march and march and march
To the banner even down from the poet’s throne
And who and who and who
Pale with heroism and hatred
When I hear and hear and hear
The clang the splitting of his head
I am I am I am
The Red Red Red singer
Of a Red hare of Red hair and a Red nose
Meo-Meo-Meow-ow-ow-ow-ow
Meow-ow Meow-ow-ow-ow.”



MENKE

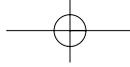
It's amazing, truly amazing,
 That he didn't see in you, my child,
 The Mister Red murderer
 Who leads the blind sun at night —
 Who sneaks the bad word in through a dream
 And slurps
 The wakeful blood of sleeping children
 Whispering:
 You fine girly, yeah, fine-fine,
 Once upon a time, yeah, once upon a time,
 A story of good luck —
 Chick-chick, Chick-chuck
 You fine girly, yeah, fine-fine;
 Who sneaks the bad word in through a dream
 And sips out
 The alert blood of sleeping children,
 Whispering:
 You my little boy, yeah, mine-mine,
 Once upon a time, yeah, once upon a time,
 A piece of good string —
 Ring, string! Sting, string!
 Little boy of mine, mine mine,
 Cuddle yourself, huddle yourself
 You cuddle, you huddle, coo coo coo,
 Chick-chick, Chick-chuck!'

It's amazing, truly amazing,
 That he didn't see in you, my child,
 The Mister Red murderer,
 He who flies out
 Up the chimney as through a smoked throat,
 Leaving the summer in a glowing frost,
 Leaving the empty cradles — full-full-full
 With pieces of sooty beard.

*GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR*

The little giant,
Ay the little giant on his blown up stilts,
Has a pen — a thick piece of trashed wood:
Instead of a nose a fat toe
Instead of a mouth a cancer of words,
Instead of a back a full sack of I's
Instead of a head a drumbeater.

O no! O no!
Not the hero — the drum
Leading an army in measured march
Onward to victory like a storm.
O no! O no!
Not galloping — the drum,
Racing his freshly combed, flying horses
Across the seething earth—
Not the spring trumpet of a whirlwind autumn,
But a drum, a rusty patch,
A dull sound,
Leaping from a croaking swamp:
“Croak-croak, Croak-ka croak,
Lo and behold
I am a poet for the world,
I want to sing my hatred of the murderers of thought.
I want to sing the song of all songs:
I want to sing of a liberated father;
Hush-sh—sh! Sh-sh-sh! Quiet-quiet-quiet !
I want! I want! I want-want-want!
Croak-croak, Croak-ka croak.



MENKE

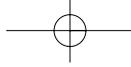
Croak-croak, Croak-ka croak.
 O, I! I! I! — I-I-I-I-I-I! “Oh, I-I-I of-the-Universe —
 I shall croak for you an I-I song;
 Ay, an I-I song, I-I song,

“O, I ache! Ache! Ache! — I ache! I ache! I ache!
 O, I break! Break! Break! — I break! I break! I break!
 I tiddle-diddle-dum, diddle-dum ache!
 I diddle-tiddle, diddle-tiddle break!

“Ay, where can I find myself?
 Where can I not find myself?
 Wherever I stand — I!
 Wherever I go — I!
 I! I! I! I-I! I-I! I-I!

“O, I ache! Ache! Ache! — I ache! I ache! I ache!
 O, I break! Break! Break! — I break! I break! I break!
 I tiddle-diddle-dum, diddle-dum ache!
 I diddle-tiddle, diddle-tiddle break!

“Ay, East — I!
 South — I! North —I!
 I! I! I! — I-I! I-I! I-I!
 Ay, only I! But I! Again I! Just I!
 I! I! I! — I-I! I-I! I-I!
 A —————y!



GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR

O
 \
 \
 Ho

When the little giant puffs up his stilts,
At the paper butter, at the ink bread —
Eternity dances onto a plate
And howls “red” and squeaks “red” and roars “red”:

O
 \
 \
 Ho

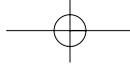
Now listen, my child:
No one has yet fooled death —
With stilts, even if they are Red —
The screeching little giant, with the steel clown’s hat,
The shortyficial, teensy-tiny

Must fall
 fall
 fall

From the stilts, the puffed up stilts,

 down
 down
down

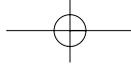
And with the nose — his fat toe,
Seek somewhere — a face, a head.

*MENKE*

And the little giant, ay the little giant is called: Mabir-Kurmoik —
His width — a penny, his height — a lie.
His flying — a soap bubble,
Through fields of invented grass:
A volcano — a smokescreen.

The little giant, ay the little giant, Mabir-Kurmoik,
Assaults his croaking drum like a devil
And shouts
With his snorting throat — over a miniscule distance:
Boo-Boo-Boom — Tornado songs I drum! —
And his voice, not the crying of a mute —
But like the last crow of a rooster, exhausted of all crowing,
Who is still crowing, hoarse and long:
Koo-koo, Koo-koo-koo!
Broo-broo, Broo-boo-boo!
Of tomorrow's storm, I am — the deadliest growl.

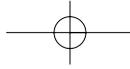
The little giant, ay the little giant, Mabir-Kurmoik
Is resting in the brave blood of "our banner."

*GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR*

Koo-koo, Koo-koo-koo!
Broo-broo, Broo-boo-boo!
When the little giant commanded:
The straightest days grew crooked,
Joy was — an inkwell full of wretches,
An eternity of ripped years —
From Genesis on, all the springs are frozen by a word.

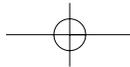
When the little giant commanded —
A pure bird shampooed itself in a puddle of ink,
A worm carried an eagle;
Red rust swore: I am sunrise,
A straw flew like a thorn —
To peck the eyes of the toothiest devil.

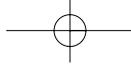
Koo-koo, Koo-koo-koo!
Broo-broo, Broo-boo-boo!
When the little giant commanded,
A dream ignited like a torch,
Suns went out
Like wet coals in a frozen oven;
A fly chased away the wolf,
A thread restrained the storm.
When the little giant commanded:
A bubble remained of the sea,
One dark corner enclosed all the distances —
Beauty lay, flayed like a corpse.



MENKE

The little giant, ay the little giant, Mibir-Kurmoik
Dressed up in inky mud
The “naked red of our banner” —
(The gleam of rotten wood cannot love the sun.)
So the little giant smiles — stiff and precise;
Red buttons hold his gray joy,
Buttoned up against sunny sadness.
So the little giant smiles in the latest fashion —
He embraces
The blazing song of storm
With a thousand screeching odes.
But woe to the pasted-on word that would be a nightingale —
For a real nightingale does not sing with the voice of a flea.



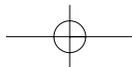


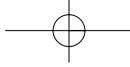
GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR

A swamp of ink, O what is swamplier:
Thirst itself did not drink here.
The moon, like a drunkard in a dream,
Barely limped through.

A falling pebble did not make any ripples here.
A breeze — King David's harp
Blew like a porous bellows.
Not with giants did the wind dance here,
Through the blaze of the brightest "October,"
But a blizzard limped to the rhythm of the little giant,
When ink oozed from his mouth and ears
Thick and disgusting.

O what is duller than a dull word?
A cursed stone,
Where even a bird of prey won't sharpen its beak.
O what is blinder than a blind word?
An eye that ran out, that cannot even produce a tear.



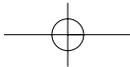


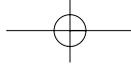
MENKE

If a tower is a story of giants,
O how many stories are you, New York?
If a breeze is a legend of a distant generation,
O how many legends in a storm?

And if our generation is more beautiful than giants and legends,
A little giant is now tinier than himself —
The coarse dreams you cannot see through binoculars.
But in a storm,
A splinter too runs in wooden fear.
In a storm,
A soggy rag can pass for a flag.
And a spit-out crumb can be faked to look the flying eagle.

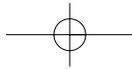
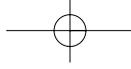
Through generations of wounds, as through the saddest sunset,
When every spring dazzled with naked frost,
When the caws of crows overwhelmed the nightingale's song,
When from shore to shore the earth burned like Hell —
How gray, gray, gray, was the Little Red Giant.

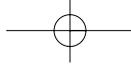


*GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR*

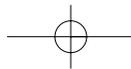
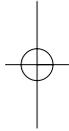
The little giant, ay, the little giant, Mabir-Kurmoik —
His width — a penny, his height — a lie.
His flying — a soap bubble,
Through fields of invented grass,
His soul — all belly,
Will not block the legend of truth,
The wonder of all wonders,
Will not illuminate darkness with a dead-wood word.

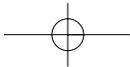
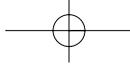
I saw corroded rust
Red in the sunset.
But Red-corroded rust
Never add ups to a sunrise
And no measuring rod ever registered
A blazing storm on an out of step drum.
All the screechers, from Egypt till now:
Screech the same, my child.
But Woe,
The little giant, ay, the little giant Mabir-Kurmoik
With a scratching scream, has for a moment chased away
The joy: Night, birds, children.

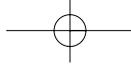




The Brave Coward

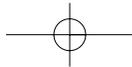
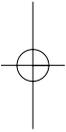


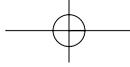


*GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR*

Forever will the coward
Fear my proud Grandmother Mona
Lest the magic wand of Our Teacher Moses
Wake her from her mossy sleep,
Lest she rise up from her ancient grave, dead, pure and clear
To expose the tin clatter of his voice,
And with her breath blow away his puffed up stilts,
Erase the watery red with her blood,
Leaving just the rattling bore unmasked.

Forever will the coward
Mug the dream in a dark alley,
And twists 'I am holy' and brays 'I am right'
"Hey, poet, over here — happiness
Happiness for sad slaves!
Hey, poet, over here — rays
Light for blind slaves.
I am Mr. Today, tasty as sap-filled orchards.
Yesterday has already been choked by time,
Tomorrow is for sickly idlers!
Produce for Today, over here please, Today!
Graveyard fear stares out from your poem.
Your poem is a mouldy path to the mouse hole.
Don't stick your sadness in our upbeat wheels."

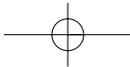
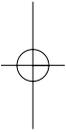


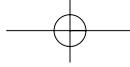


MENKE

Bravo, brave coward!
Your clanging call
Would surely wake a trembling rabbit from its nap
But I will not lead my poem into battle
My poem with its straw body
Even if ignited a thousand times red
How can one move mountains with the might of straw?
How can you scare the mighty foe,
Even if he chains himself?

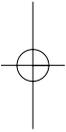
Your word — a mite with a fantastic fist,
Demands joy — big as a stick,
What can be sadder than that?
A storm of gray talk —
What can be grayer than that?
From gray talk — such a tempest,
Who can hear the end of it?
With a heart of steel, with calm blood,
How can one swear an oath?

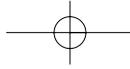




GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR

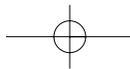
O brothers of yesterday, O sisters of tomorrow,
My heart swears, my blood swears:
Fearsome teeth will not claw you up.
The coward's whip will not touch you.
With heart and blood I will defend you.
The sadness of age will forever keep the wine young.
The most distant tomorrow will forever
Embrace the most distant yesterday,
Will forever shine through the magic of the nearest today.

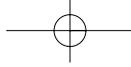




MENKE

Your rage — a fire giant,
Enough to burn away the sadness of a little fly,
If only your hatred could scratch out the eye of a foe,
If only your flame could
Heat a frozen hut.
Your word bursts like a deluge of light —
Enough to flood the nights,
Enough to polish generations of shoes with its beams.
But I get dark-dark from so much light
And I get sad-sad from so much happiness
All your joy can scare me
As in a story book — once-once.
In Michaleshik at night in the cemetery
A Golem with a voice turned clear
With a face of a ghost
And dressed in shrouds
Used to do a hopka to wake the dead.



*GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR*

Because you are sad as a thousand Coney Island suns
Your joy is sadder than all sadness,
Because the poet's sadness can be more joyful than all joy.
My days found so much sadness,
As darkness can shine through the brightest joy,
So darkness shines through my poem.

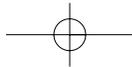
I give you all the rivers from dripping faucets,
I take a drop — pensive dew.
I give you all the rainbows of word rockets,
Of all the fires — I take a single spark.

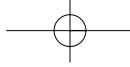
And I so love
To walk through all the darkneses —
A single spark,
And I so love
To be myself the light that dispels the gloom around me.

I saw
A spark block all the fires.
I saw
A blind yesterday brighten the tomorrow.

I saw
October blossom like a thousand Mays,
I saw
The prettiest bird live off a worm
I will not be afraid like the coward
To strip my work naked even in a mouse hole.

I saw
An endless night turn into dawn.
I saw
A storm — chase away the coward.



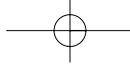


MENKE

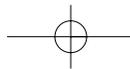
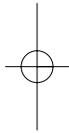
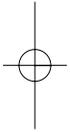
And when,
From too much clanging the great clanger deafens himself.
The lonely drum prays in silence:
Come, O brave drummer, Come —
“How shall I conjure up the clouds,
When it isn't rain
But a hail of hard words that drums in me.

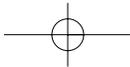
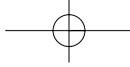
Come O brave drummer, Come;
The lonely drum prays in silence:
Come, O longing — Come, O beloved, come,
For my joy is different without you,
As fragrant darkness in an open field
Differs from condemned darkness in a death cell

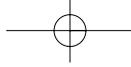
And come, O sad flute —
Give me a darkness that haunts the lucid light —
A light all-encompassing, unto darkness.
O, give me a joy dismaying unto tears —
A joy, a sad flute,
That lifts up the depths
And carries them up to longing heights
O, give me anguish that makes the gray day a holiday.



O Michaleshik





*GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR*

Once upon a time there was a story:
A smoky little hut, as if made of clouds,
On the earthen floor, a snuffed out sky.
Death lives in the nearby graveyard,
With a body of grass, a heart of mould.

O, Michaleshik, my heritage of clean muddy streets,
With grandmother stories,
Dirty-faced children playing the games of angels,
With the distant Viliya River
Coming to quench your thirst.

O, Michaleshik, my heritage of bright darkneses,
Of grandmother's maybes and grandfather's whys,
Of Talmud-dancing fingers: the seventh nuance of a nuance,
Where little breezes comb the grasses of the Kumsa,
Where every grain of sand is miracle,
Every little worm — God.

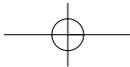
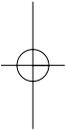
Through me —
Your springtime restlessness driving the first ice floes,
The shivers of boys and girls on the banks of the Viliya,
When every wave gives birth to a mermaid
And there —
In the midnight dread of Uncle Chaim's smithy,
A lover stealthily sharpens his jealous knife
Through me —
The longing ruins are falling meteors,
Your narrowest path is bigger than all the planets.

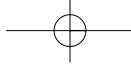


MENKE

Through me —
Your hatred of Pig Street, the brawls of boisterous youth
Through me —
Your blind autumn will always sing of a thousand springs.

Through me —
The wandering distances of your beggars,
When, barefoot and naked,
Hurled
Behind a ruined village,
They uproot in the screaming night so fearsomely quiet
And see the midnight of curses as big as a sinner's sin,
Until like beggar sacks of horror they begin to dawn
And through me —
The desolation of stray dogs with flogged hides
The murderous bark,
That dares to chase away the frost and hunger.



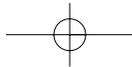


GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR

Michaleshik, dark reality and pure legend,
You gave me
Words — not with rich juices of September
Where stars lie drunk upon full, laden grapes,
But where in mended sacks the carcass of a summer
Frightens fall houses with scarcity and frost.

You gave me
Words — oldtimers, bent under the burden of gray wisdom,
And words for clandestine walks,
When moony silence boils in love-blood
And minutes rush to seduce each other,

Words that play out a young eternity,
As the aged plays young in the desirous wine,
Words that chase
The wheel of the sun through eternal night.

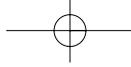


MENKE

Michaleshik, dark reality and pure legend,
You gave me
Words — heavy, mighty camels,
Laden with patience for endless deserts —
Through jackals' wild distances, ready
To wash their thirst in blazing sand,

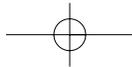
And words light as weightless light
That dawns freedom in a death cell.
Words, through pitch-black woods,
Crawling on their wounds to spy out the enemy,
Words, locked under a thousand locks
That ghosts and murderers cannot budge.

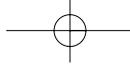
Words — stars over city towers and crooked alleys,
Words echoing off screaming steel
With the modest sound of the past,
Words — raging squares
In love like Michaleshik and as hungry as Svintsyan,
Words choked on gallows, words — death flowers,
Tell how much sound there is in silence,
Tell how much blackness is drenched in sun.

*GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR*

O Michaleshik,
You passed over my lean childhood
With the step of a tornado
And of all the songs left only the rattle of skeletons.
Cannons plucked your goat's dawn,
When goats with starting beards called
'Good morning and good year' to the Morning Star.
O Michaleshik, wounded ash of a lethal sunrise,

Through me — the evildoer's fiery whip,
The evil tidings of a crowing twilight,
Which sank over your every roof.
Hark, I saw you in the storm — a howling thorn.
O thorn, I love you more than all flowers.
O Michaleshik, how could I not resemble you —
My joy, my poem and my blood,
Since through me (No —
Your death, your sun and your valor shine
The twentieth generation.

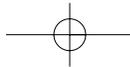
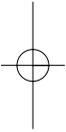


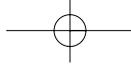


MENKE

— — — — —
Goodbye, my nearby grandson — my distant joy:
In your little room,
I see the poor life of my great great grandfathers,
I see the electric God of New York put to shame,
With the same old demon hovering round a mourning candle.
I see my strong race flickering in the same glimmer
That brings smoky serpents onto the ceiling.
At your ruin walls, I recognized
In the wind the same songs of need.

Goodbye, my nearby grandchild — my distant joy:
You're named after me and my proud family —
A lineage of millers, woodcutters and Viliya raftsmen,
A lineage of grandfather giants,
Who rode on horses as on lightning bolts to their chosen ones —
A lineage to be invoked together with Samson on the day of
memory.



*GRANDMOTHER MONA TAKES THE FLOOR*

Good Night, O good Grandmother Mona:
Michaleshik — the poorhouse in love,
Did not yet have a roll to chew,
And hunger, the ugly lizard
Brings too soon the garment-rending of the mourner.

On Pig Street, when orchards are not yet green,
In the cursed ruins, beggars' children do turn green,
And over the crooked paths still the dominion
Of demonic spirits.

Wrinkled autumns still lament in the graveyard hut.
Above the just-cleansed horror of the corpse board,
The moon still hangs like a robber's silver sack.

Grandmothers who have cried themselves out
In psalm-chanting midnights
Still look to find for you
The bread of Leviathan and salt of the moon —
And still cannot find for you
A place in the Garden of Eden.

Now Goodnight, my good grandmother Mona.
With generations of the poorhouse in your eyes,
Hark, I see you, a living women's prayerbook,
Bent over all your good deeds.
Hark, I see you,
Vainly looking for the promised sunrises,
But the trampled yesterday
Can no longer find your lost suns.
But in my bones, in my blood,
Your long set day
Now arises.

