And This Is What You Should Say To The Orphan

By Avrom Sutzkever Translated by Miri Koral

…And this is what you should say to the orphan
When he lifts up frail fists
And asks: who am I?

--Your father, believing, lifted his head …
A dark current inundated him
With boiling ash
And molten brimstone.
And swept him up,
And his wife,
His children,
School and cemetery.
And swept up all the ancestors,
And you, who were hidden
In the womb of the future…
Because he who succumbs
Murders the generations
That ferment in him
Waiting for redemption, ---
Only you remain,
So you are the heir:
A kernel of holiness in windy fingers
Crumbled on rock-razed fields -- -- --

A tiny piece that is
A diminished whole.

And if he asks:
----And what is my name?
Answer the orphan:
----Your name is Folk,
Because that was the name of your bearded grandfather
Endlessly wandering the back roads…
And because in your essence
Worlds collide,
And those folk who strike you
Are themselves stricken
And fall blinded
On their own swords –-
Then weave into the nocturnal alien places
Your Spring,
Clear as a brook
Facing the light of dawn.
Because you are a blood-spattered miracle
And timeless – -- --

A tiny piece that is
A diminished whole -- -- --

And if he asks:
----For whom?
Then answer:
----For those who sprout from your heart
And will the spirit of millions
Transform
Into a warm home
For all the orphans…

For those, who themselves will mold destiny
To their own dreams
To their own design…
And you, whose name is Folk,
And your face –
A demolished nest
Without birds,
Without inhabitants, --
Clamber up the steps of the night,
Encounter the dawn
And shout at it:
---Cleanse me anew, sun
And forgive:
All that occurred is an error of fortune.
-- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- --- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- --
I'll prepare real days instead of graves,
I'll build my own cities with my own arms.
And there eternity will come to dwell
And days will blaze in gilded crowns.

February 12, 1943

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און אויב ער וועט פֿרעגן:
– פֿאַר וועמען?
איז ענטפֿער:
– פֿאַר יענע, וואָס וואָרצלען אַרויס פֿון דײַן האַרצן
און וועלן דעם גײַסט פֿון מליאָנען
פֿאַרוואַנדלען
אין אַ וואַרעמער היים
פֿאַר אַלע יתומים.
פֿאַר די, וואָס אַליין וועלן קנעטן דעם גורל
נאָך אייגענעם חלום,
נאָך אייגענעם פֿורעם.
און דו, וואָס דײַן נאָמען איז פֿאָלק,
און דײַן פּנים –
אַ חרובֿע נעסט
אָן פֿייגל,
אָן טענער, –
קלעטער אַרויף אויף די טרעפּ פֿון דער נאַכט,
באַגעגן דעם אויפֿגאַנג
און שרײַ אים אַנטקעגן:
– רייניק מיך, זון, אויף דאָס נײַ
און זײַ מוחל,
אַלץ וואָס געווען איז דעם גורלס אַ טעות.

כ׳וועל צוגרייטן אמתע טעג אַנשטאָט קבֿרים,
כ׳וועל אויסבויען אייגענע שטעט מיט מײַן אָרעם.
און דאָרטן וועט קומען די אייביקייט ווינען
און טעג וועלן לײַכטן אין גילדענע קרוינען!