A Little Flower
by Avrom Sutzkever

For wanting to bring a little flower through the ghetto gate
my neighbor with seven lashes paid.
How dear the blue Spring is for him now --
this little flower with its pupil of gold!
My neighbor bears his memento with no regret:
Spring breathes in his flesh --he so wanted it ...

(Vilna Ghetto, May 29, 1943)
Translated by Miri Koral

Scorched Pearls
by Avrom Sutzkever

Not because my words convulse
just like broken hands after they’re freed,
not because in the dark they sharpen
towards a body like teeth,
-- after satiation --
that you blow on the coals
of my burning wrath,
you, written word, my world’s transformer;
but because your sounds glimmer
like burnt pearls
in an extinguished pyre,
and no one -- not even I -- ravaged by the days,
recognizes the woman awash in flames,
of all that lady’s joys, amongst the ashes
only her pearls, scorched grey, remain -- --

(Vilna Ghetto, July 28, 1943)
Translated by Miri Koral