It will come to pass
by Yisroel Shtern (1933)
translated by Miriam Leberstein (2006)

(*For my friend Engineer I.R. in Dresden*)

1

On that night a voice will burst out weeping and fill the world:
Not my wife...not my home...not my word...not my wealth...

On that night, the sky will burst out weeping,
a black shroud stricken with loneliness
after the corpse has been taken from the house…

On that night
the dark will suddenly become aware
that it has suffered its darkness for a thousand years.

On that night, they will hang an old Jew by the soft leather straps
of his tefillin[1] amidst the hay in a fragrant barn,
and such fear will hover over the orchards
that the watchmen will keep fires burning throughout the night…

Not that anyone will steal:
the unripe fruit will drop from the sickly trees
like flesh falls from the bones of a syphilitic.

On that night the dead will rise from their graves,
as it sometimes happens, in a moment of clarity
there arises in one's memory
an incisive word of wisdom from an ancient text —
and the living will be ashamed that they still live.

On that night a thousand Jews will lie silent, dull clods of earth,
and in one of the thousand a thought will start to sprout:
If God has lost us, then he will find us…
and quietly as a flower in the breeze, his lips move: Sh'ma...! [2]
And another, who this very night has lost his senses

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[1] (Ed) phylacteries, i.e., small leather boxes containing Torah texts, worn for morning prayers.
[2] (Ed.) Sh'ma Yisroel…, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" , the prayer known to all Jews, even the most unobservant.

will rend the night with his ha-ha-ha —
Not my home... not my word... not my child... not my wealth...

On that night
a voice will burst out weeping and fill the world.

2

At dawn…
the feeble fingers of morning
will pluck away at the night
the way children pluck at blueberries.

The dawn will be beautiful in its pain.
What this night sought, it will not find —
it will die otherwise than it desired.
Clouds will drowse on opalescent beds
and like sparkling bangles on severed hands
the sky will swirl with bands
of gold upon blood, blood upon gold.

Beautiful and ominous will be the dawn.
And the conqueror will still be lying safely in his bed
with his watchman guarding the old gates;
above them ancient trees shake their heads in regret.
Wise elders shake their heads as well,
their arms outspread in puzzlement.

And a wind rushes about, tapping at the walls
of the world like a blind man.

It is looking for someone to tell
what it has heard in the inner sanctum:

This is what God says: at night, at night
I inscribe the sacred parchment of the Torah scroll
with the searing fire of starry script.
My letters fall fearsomely to earth.
And in those who have murdered
they lodge, hidden and piercingly sharp
like a hieroglyph in the heart.
And those who are murdered will spread my missives over the world.

A wind rushes about, tapping at the walls of the city
and reveals the secrets of the inner sanctum,
that it heard at night from God
about those who have murdered.

Trees are old and have already seen much,
they know to rue the conqueror.
And suddenly in that dawn it will come to pass:
that those who lie drunk, secure with open gates
will wake from sleep to a living dream:
a wind tapping at the walls of the world like a blind man.
He rushes up to them, the blind man, and laughs in their faces —
And they must listen to the secret of the night.

Trembling, they will struggle to escape their punishment
but their pride is pared away, grows small and thin.
They will know that the great ending has now begun
and that it is hard to grow rich on lamentation.

The blind wind laughs and tells and tells,
and the conquerors feel their conquests falling away.

The blind wind laughs and they must listen
and grow mad with grief and pain
and try to hold their lordly heads unbowed.
As happens when a little boy says Kaddish in shul[3]
and his bearded elders must listen and be still.

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[3] (Ed) K*addish*= the prayer said by a son for a deceased parent; *shul* = synagogue.