

August

On the last Sunday in August, when cold winds press
against their measured pace, the survivors still come
to name the dead.

A hall, spare and simple, is cavernous without you,
an empty chair beside me—
in case I need to whisper in your ear.

Memory is never framed in photographs,
but anchored in your words
they carry me on Pegasus' wings
to the absent ones I grew to love.

On other Sundays when we walked along the pier,
my hand in yours, you'd take me to Baluty,
where bookish weavers declared
Isaiah's brave new world and where,
in dusk's half-light, two figures
waited for us at the doorway to their *Bundist* dreams.

The staccato of the shuttles quietened,
air pungent with onion and potato soup,
behind a coal-filled stove I nestled in your mother's warmth,
stood close enough to see
your father's face aglow in the embers of his pipe;

on his lap a Yiddish volume beneath a stream of silken ash.

And then, as always, like a thunderbolt they came—
the shameless men who tore apart a prophet's vision,
built a wall and shut the gate with that decisive thud.
Inside, a timber footbridge sagged beneath
the crusted blood-stained ice; pitch black
helmets incinerating any promise of a day. And at night,
through the windowpane of your one room palace,
the squealer moon leaked its yellow perfidy.

Leave! You'd plead, your voice, familiar, low and urgent,
Leave this place where madness has no seasons.

And so, your eyes, dark with silent grief, propelled my flight
above Baluty's chimney tops.

Floating like a lone Chagallian image, from there
I'd watch you board the train, watched
black smoke unfurl into a seamless August sky,
watched it follow you.

As it followed me, follows me, will follow...