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באַליידיקט • Wounded

by Malka Lee, translation by Maia Evrona

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Wounded

Malka Lee
translated by Maia Evrona

Translator's introduction: By publishing this translation, I feel that I am giving something of myself away as a writer. I read Malka Lee's poem "Baleydikt" early on in my Yiddish education, as it was often included in samples of Yiddish poetry written by women. I am still enamored of its imaginative, ethereal lyricism and concise nine-line form, made up of three triplets. All three stanzas rhyme with one another and in the original Yiddish, the poem has a particularly lovely, flowing musicality. The music has proven quite difficult to transfer into English, and I've allowed myself more liberties than I often do in my translation work. My English version is not a literal translation of the original poem.

I've sat on this translation for many years, making the occasional edit here and there. Even as I haven't published this English version of "Baleydikt" however, I have adopted it as a model, and have written or revised a number of my own, original poems into its nine lines. I've found the form helpful for distilling a poem down to its essence and though I aspire but have never attained quite its level of musicality, I enjoy experimenting with what one can fit into nine lines, and how.

Malka Lee was born in 1904 in Galicia. She wrote her first poems in German, after spending part of her childhood in Vienna, but switched to Yiddish after arriving in New York in 1921. She published six volumes of poetry, as well as a book of memoirs and stories for children. She passed away in 1976.

From *Lider* by Malka Lee, published in 1932:

Wounded

You leaned your body over mine —
Suddenly velvet wings took flight,
Stroking my face with the lashes of your eyes. . .

White roofs swayed through waves of powder,
Houses rode through hills of water —
Drew us down, down with them together.

My head is bent as if for slaughter,
From last night I am still wounded,
And beg again, my braids untwisted. . .

באַליידיק

דו האָסט זיך איבער מיר געבויגן —
סאַמעט-פֿליגל זײַנען אָנגעפֿלויגן,
געגלעט מיין פנים מיט ווײַס פֿון דיײַנע אויגן...
האַבן ווײַסע דעכער זיך געוויגט אין שטויבן,
הײַזער האָבן זיך אין וואַסערבערג געבויגן —
אונדז מיט זיך אַראָפּ, אַראָפּ געצויגן.
מיין קאָפּ איז אויסגעבויגן ווי צום שעכטן,
איך בין באַליידיקט נאָך פֿון נעכטן,
און בעט אויף סײַ, מײַנע צעפֿלעכטן...