

# Rise, Awake and Sing

by Rachel Heimowitz

## **Rise, Awake and Sing**

*"Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise; awake and sing, you who lie in the dust"*

*(Isaiah 26:19)*

A medieval town where nothing stands straight,  
where Kafka sat, slept, ate. Where time  
reads backwards on a Hebrew clock and a Golem  
waits in an attic for the electric shock of life.

Eight hundred years, a thriving ghetto:  
yellow hats, yellow circles, yellow stars;  
a child's cut-out of betrayal.

*My G-d the soul you have placed in me is pure.*

A shul, a great gravestone, vacant,  
unused; the winter sun reflects  
off the ceiling's vault. The wall's hue  
up close becomes something new,  
letters, black and red: names:  
in Moravia, listed by town,  
in Bohemia, by province,  
dates of birth and death, a wallpaper  
tattoo, back to back, names stacked—  
a ladder of names—  
eighty thousand dead.

*You created it; you have formed it; you have breathed it into me.*

On the eastern wall:  
Emil (b. 1868-d.1942) straightens  
his tie. Berta (b.1874-d.1942) turns,  
lights the flame, knowing  
warmth fills the house night and day.

On the west:  
Hedvika (b. 1914-d.1942) steps

into her pumps, sets her hat,  
makes her way to the train.

On the southern wall  
with the sun's glance upon them:  
Karolina (b. 1932-d.1942) skipping rope.  
Oskar (b. 1930-d.1943), a stick, an old wheel,  
a downward slope—

*You preserve it within me; You will take it from me,*

Trying to be Hapsburgs; German impeccable.  
Heads high past the guard, one thousand  
at a time, boarding trains with favorite dolls,  
candlesticks, a bedroll. Delivered  
to Terezin, where no one was allowed  
to outgrow their shoes. Through  
the Schleuse. On the other side  
everything removed but a ration card.

Later, on Auschwitz trains, their prayer  
is for a bite of bread when they arrive.  
Instead stripped, shaved, showers  
of foul air. No survivors—only ashes  
at the bottom of the Vistula River.

*and restore it to me in the hereafter...*

You, who line these walls, you are the dry bones,  
the flesh formed around the original egg,  
the porous souls,  
the pure water poured that swept us home,  
the bridge between the grave  
and the land, ashes fused into rocky  
soil, hills that ascend  
like milkfat breasts. Your arms, the towns  
that hold us; your smiles the rivers  
that spring forth, spill over, fall with laughter.  
You are the kibbutz fence at night;  
your hearts the iron that guards us.

Karolina, Oskar, you fill the schools and parks  
while Hedvika sips coffee at the café.

Emil is on his way to shul, as thousands  
of Bertas cover their hair at the siren's sound,  
strike the match, draw in the holy  
flame and bless the Shabbat candles.

*Blessed are You, O Hashem, who restores the souls of the dead.*

