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Poem A: Come See My Rebels

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Poem A

COME SEE MY REBELS

Come see my rebels
my thin-legged rebels,
Yochanan of Gush-Halav lean and winning
and Shimon from the desert
splay-footed.

(In Golgotha there stood not one cross
but three.
And in Galilee they did not redouble their weeping.)
He who hammered in nails was a master at his craft
and he who made crosses was an honest labourer.
In Roman workshops round-about Jerusalem
day-workers toiled.

Where rows of flats now stand, crosses dreamt of
new comers.
And the rain came down in sheets, and blood
mixed in with the soil and the planks.
Red hearts beat with repressed
revenge.
And my rebels downed cheap wine and said:
We will yet drink a toast in the cellars of Pilate.
And when they lifted their robes they were thin and consumptive
and splay-footed.

And Yochanan of Gush-Halav was lean and winning
and he had never set eyes on Bar-Giora,
(and in the Galilee they were not moved by the sign of the cross
against the flat of the sky).

All this Flavius did not tell you
but he knew
there would be no toasts raised in the cellars of Pilate,
(and Pilate was dead)
and his heart was cold
like a Roman Legion
winding its way through the alleys of Jerusalem.

And my rebels put on clothes
that made them look like trees
swaying in the wind.
And they knew that only on flaming beds
at last
would they come to rest.

And Bar-Giora lingered in the desert
and in Jerusalem they longed for peace and safety,
and in Gush-Halav men sported with
steel
and made ready for action.

And rain splattered on the roof-tops in
a rhythmic
stammer.
And the hooded heavy-lidded legions
snaked in the mire.
And at day-break crosses were etched in blue pencil
against the flat of the sky.
And when the new pro-consul took office,
he shook hands with all the centurions
and the elders of Jerusalem.
And the city rocked to and fro.
And with pointed eyes my rebels
drank wine and said:

But at times the word froze on their lips.
And they pressed against the pane and listened
to the thump of hammers
in the hands
of the honest labourers.

trans. Adah Lappin and Eli Pfefferkorn