

Mayn Yingele (My Little Son)

poem by Morris Rosenfeld, sweatshop poet, New York, 1887; composer unknown

Yiddish Lyrics

1. Ikh hob a kleynem yingele,
A zunele gor fayn!
Ven ikh derze im, dakht zikh mir,
Di gantse velt iz mayn.

2. Nor zeltn, zeltn zey ikh im,
Mayn sheynem, ven er vakht,
Ikh tref im imer shlofendik,
Ikh zey im nor bay nakht.

3. Di arbet traybt mikh fri aroys
Un lozt mikh shpet tsurik;
A fremd iz mir mayn eygn leyb!
O, fremd mayn kind's a blik!

4. Ikh kum tsuklemterheydt aheym,
In finsternish gehilt,
Mayn bleykhe froy dertseylt mir bald,
Vi fayn dos kind zikh shpilt.

5. Vi zis es redt, vi klug es fregt:
"O, mame, gute ma,
Ven kumt un brengt a peni mir
Mayn guter, guter pa?"

6. Ikh her es tsu un ayl - es muz, -
Yo, yo, es muz geshen!
Di foterlibe flakert oyf:
Es muz mayn kind mikh zen!....

7. Ikh shtey bay zayn gelegerl
Un zey, un her, un sha!
A troym bavegt di lipelekh:
"O, vu iz, vu iz pa?"

8. Ikh kush di bloye eygelekh,
Zey efnen zikh - "o, kind!"
Zey zeyen mikh, zey zeyen mikh,
Un shlisn zikh geshvind.

9. "Do shteyt dayn tate tayerer,
A penele dir, na!"
A troym bavegt di lipelekh:
"O, vu iz, vu iz pa?"

English Translation

I have a little boy,
A son really fine!
When I see him, it seems to me
The whole world is mine.

But seldom, seldom, do I see him,
My beauty, when he's awake,
I find him always asleep,
I see him only at night.

Work drives me out early
And lets me back late;
O, strange is to me my own flesh,
O, strange the look of my child!

I come home sadly,
In darkness wrapped,
My pale wife tells me soon
How fine the child does play.

How sweet he talks, how cleverly he asks:
"Oh Mama, good Ma,
When comes and brings a penny to me
My good, good Pa?"

I listen to this and it hurries me -it must-
Yes, yes, it must happen!
The fatherly love flares up:
It must be that my child sees me!

I stand by his little bed,
And see, and hear, and shhhh!
A dream moves his lips:
"Oh where, where is Pa?"

I kiss his blue eyes,
They open, "o, child!"
They see me, they see me,
And close quickly.

"Here stands your father dear,
A penny for you, here!"
A dream moves his lips:
"Oh where, where is Pa?"

10. Ikh blayb, tseveytikt un tseklemt,
Farbitert, un ikh kler:
"Ven du dervakhst a mol, mayn kind,
Gefinstu mikh nit mer"

I remain, pained and dejected,
Filled with bitterness, and I think:
"When you awake one day, my child,
You will find me no more."