

A Postcard from Berta Tubisman

אומבעקאנטע פֿראינד מיט אַייער נאמען  
 [??] איך בעט איר זאלט אזא גוט זאיין  
 אונד אופֿזוכין מאיין שוועסטער אונד איבער  
 געבען מאיין קארטל: ליבע שוועסטער [?  
 בועה]? לעה דוא זאלסט לעבען אונד זאיין  
 געזונד מיט דאיין מאן אונד מיט דאינע  
 קינדער איך שרייב דיר מאיין ליבע  
 שוועסטער איך ווייס ניט וואס איבער צו  
 קלערן וואס איך האב דיר שיין געסריבן  
 עטליכע בריף און איך האב פֿון דיר קיין  
 אנטווארט ניט אנשט[דין]\*? [מאיין ליבע  
 שוועסטער וואס איך ווענדעט זיך צו דיר צו  
 הילפע איבער דעם וואס איך מוז זיך ווידער  
 פֿארן היילן מיט מאיין טאכטער און ער איז  
 זייער שלעכט ער יאגט מיך פֿארסטייט דוא  
 דאך אז קיין געלט וועט ער מיר ניט געבען  
 ער יאגט די קינדער אייך ארויס נור זיין  
 ארבייטן און פֿערדינען אָפֿן מיטעלס לעבען  
 אליין: נור איך בין קראנק און פֿערדינען קען  
 איך ניט בעט איך באיי דיר אז דוא זאלסט  
 אויך [??] וואס גיכער מיר ארויס צו סיקין  
 אביסל געלט איך זאל זיך קענען העלפֿין מיט  
 מאיין קינד דוא פֿערסטייט דאך ער איז דער  
 באלעבאס וויל ער גיט ער מיר אָפֿ דעם בריף  
 און אז ער וויל גיט ער מיר ניט אָפֿ דעם  
 בריף שרייב איך דיר מאיון ליבער שוועסטער  
 אז [אין]\*? זאלסט שרייבן אזוי אז איך זאָל  
 בעקומען וואס גיכער פֿון דיר אענטפֿער  
 פֿערבלייב געזונד פֿון מיר דאיין שוועסטער  
 ביילע

Umbekante fraynd mit ayer nomen [??]  
 ikh beyt ir zolt aza gut zayn und  
 ufzukhn mayn shvester und iber gebn  
 mayn kortl: libe shvester [Bueh?] Leah  
 du zolst leben und zayn gezond mit  
 dayn man und mit dayne kinder ikh  
 shrayb dir mayn libe shvester ikh veys  
 nit vos iber tsu klern vos ikh hov dir  
 sheyn gesribn etlikhe brif un ikh hob fun  
 dir keyn antvort nit ansht[din?]  
 [antshidn?] mayn libe shvester vos ikh  
 vendet zikh tsu dir tsu hilfe iber dem  
 vos ikh muz zikh vider forn heyln mit  
 mayn tokhter un er iz zeyer shlekht er  
 yogt mikh farshteyts du dokh uz keyn  
 gelt vet er mir nit geben er jogt di  
 kinder oykh aroys nur zey arbeytn un  
 ferdinen ufn mitls leben aleyne: nur ikh  
 bin krank un ferdinen ken ikh nit beyt  
 ikh bay dir uz du zolst oykh [??] vos  
 gikher mir aroys tsu sikin abisl gelt ikh  
 zol zikh kenen helfin mit mayn kind du  
 fersteys dokh er iz der balebos vil er git  
 er mir op dem brif un uz er vil git er mir  
 nit op dem brif shrayb ikh dir mayn liber  
 shvester uz [in\*?] zolst shraybn azoy uz  
 ikh zol bekumen vos gikher fun dir  
 entfer ferblayb gezond fun mir dayn  
 shvester Beyle

Unknown friend with your (good?) name  
 [??], may I ask you to kindly find my sister  
 and pass on my postcard.

Dear Sister [??] Leah

I wish you well, and your husband  
 and children too. I'm writing to you, my  
 dear sister, as I'm puzzled that I've written  
 you several letters already and haven't  
 received any reply at all from you my dear  
 sister, to whom I turn for help as, once  
 again, I have to go away with my daughter  
 for treatment.

And he is very bad. He drives me  
 away. You do understand that he won't  
 give me money. He drives the children  
 away too. But they are working and bring  
 money in for food themselves: But I am ill  
 and can't earn a living. I beg you please  
 [also ??] to send a little money out to me  
 as soon as possible so that I can help my  
 child and myself. You do understand that  
 he's the boss. If he wants, he will let me  
 have the letter. And, if he wants, he  
 won't let me have the letter. (So) I'm  
 writing to you, my dear sister, to ask you to  
 write (back) and make sure I receive an  
 answer from you as soon as possible.

Keep well.

From me, your sister, Beyle

Key: [??] and [??] = Character(s) or word(s) impossible to decipher or not decipherable with certainty.



Yiddish postcard from Berta Tubisman addressed to Brout [G. Brout, anarchist from Odessa] at 14 Passage Gustave Lepeu, Paris. Sent from Orel, June 1934.

## Commentary

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Berta Izrailevna Tubisman (Betya, surname sometimes given as Tubasman) was an anarchist-communist born in Vinnitsa who lived in Odessa. She worked in a sweet factory. She was one of the veteran anarchists who was arrested after the 1929 Odessa anarchist conference disguised as a New Year party (see Anatoly Dubovik's *The Anarchist underground in the Ukraine in the 1920s and 1930s*. Outlines of history <http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/b2rcr2> )

In a letter in the Fleshin collection, Leah Feldman asks (in December 1931) if the Relief Fund have news of Tubisman as "I have not had any letters from her for a long time."

<http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/djhc33>

Arrested on January 27, 1934, on May 14, 1934 she was sentenced to a three-year term of exile (to the Northern region ie Arkhangelsk).

The stream-of-consciousness flow of words, the writer's concern to cram as much as possible into the space available, the way the lines are more and more closely packed together as the writing proceeds and, above all, the actual content - all tend to convey a strong sense of distress and desperation. On the face of it, the message is highly personal, a plea to a sister for help and understanding.

However, a whole list of questions arise:

Why does the writer apparently not know her own sister's whereabouts and have to rely on a third party to ensure her message gets through? Does 'sister' here just mean 'comrade'? Or could it mean both? Presumably the 'he' who is treating her badly (given the date of the letter) means the secret police.

This is the only letter in Yiddish from Tubisman in the Flechin archive. The other four letters to Brout are in Russian. Why does she now switch to Yiddish?

Why does she refer first to her children in the plural and then to 'my child' as if he or she is the only one? Why doesn't the writer refer to this child by name in this message seemingly written to the child's own aunt?

We can see some connections here without fully understanding them. So there is still work to be done! Thanks to Murray Glickman for translating from Yiddish. The biographical details about Tubisman draw on Anatoly Dubovik's work for the Memorial website.

This is an expanded version (with the Yiddish text) of the version that was published in the KSL Bulletin.

From Folder 75 of the Flechine Archive at the IISG in Amsterdam:

<http://search.socialhistory.org/Record/ARCH00414/Description>. See also <https://senyaflechinpapers.wordpress.com/2014/12/29/flechine-folder-75/>