

Upstairs the Eulogy, Downstairs the Rummage Sale

By Yehoshua November

The beloved Yiddish professor
passed away on the same day
as the synagogue's rummage sale,

and because they could not bear
the coffin up the many steps
that led to the sanctuary,
they left it in the hallway downstairs,

and because I was not one of his students,
and it didn't matter if I heard the eulogy,
they told me to stay downstairs,
to watch over the body and recite Psalms.

And I thought,
this is how it is in the life and death of a righteous man:
upstairs, in the sanctuary,
they speak of you in glowing terms,
while down below your body rests beside
old kitchen appliances.

And I recited the Psalms as intently
as I could over a man I had only met once,
and because I knew where he was headed,
and you and I were to wed in a few months,
I asked that he bring with him a prayer for a good marriage.

And this is how it is in the life and death of a righteous man:
strangers pray over the sum of your days,
and strangers ask you to haul their heavy requests
where you cannot even take your body.

From the book G-d's Optimism