My Grandmother-Tongue

In the suburbs of Moscow it is very green;
The sky is clear and the air is fresh.
In the dacha, it’s like in Shukshin’s* place,
but it nevertheless feels Sholem Aleichem-ish.
Yes, that’s the way I felt
in those good old days,
when the fresh dew in the cool, little garden
seemed to renew our beautiful little garden settlement
every morning.
Full of life, I was enchanted.

Years before,
my grandfather and grandmother themselves built a wooden house
and painted it in pink then.
Right after that,
black swallows came
to roost in their plastered nests
just beneath the strong roof,
next to the sign with my grandfather’s name.
And quite simply,
in an everyday manner and not preachily,
Yiddish rang out in the dacha.
It was precisely there that I heard a lot of it,
as my grandparents spoke their homey, dear language…
it was that sort of little Paradise.

My grandfather Aaron, my grandmother Rachel,
my dear ones, may their memories be for a blessing,
my dear ones, my happiness and woe…
Ah, how I want to hope and believe
that now they see there, from above,
how I write Yiddish about them!
I remember…my heart skips a beat…
grandma Rachel saying to me: “Farmakh di tir!”**
or, a bit annoyed,
saying: “A naye mayse!”*** with a little sigh,
or, about my grandfather (getting angry):
“Emidem krikht er!”****
In the name of God—don’t be angry at me in Paradise
because I’m telling about that now!
Every Yiddish word I heard from you
has remained in my heart forever,
and for that I am lucky and rich,
and like you I love them all;
I long for both light and goodness
and I feel both excitement and deep calm.

 Though my grandfather was a Litvak,
he would often say “zogt er” with a “u”.
I would ask: “Shto takoye ’zugter’”?*****
and he would answer quietly: “gavarit.”******
And the wick wasn’t pulled out.