

the ILANOT
Review

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The Ilanot Review is a biannual journal of creative writing that publishes a stellar selection of poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and literary interviews.

The Ilanot Review is produced by a small but dedicated staff of volunteer editors, under the advisement of Marcela Sulak, director of the Shaindy Rudoff Creative Writing Program at Bar-Ilan University. We publish two editions per year: a spring issue that showcases work by Bar-Ilan students, graduates, and writers affiliated with the Program, and a fall issue that invites submissions from English-language poets and writers who live in Israel, or have lived there in the past.

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Editor's Note

This is the first printed publication of *The Ilanot Review*, an online literary journal showcasing the work of emerging writers alongside that of established poets and writers. The journal is affiliated with the Shaindy Rudoff Graduate Program in Creative Writing at Bar-Ilan, the only English-language creative writing program in Israel.

The theme of this issue, *Passing Through*, is especially apt for a journal staffed by the alumni of a creative writing program in Israel. Many of the program's participants and instructors are temporary visitors who come to experience the country as much as to nurture their writing. This sense of a brief but intense experience of place is apparent in Mark Mirsky's essay about his time as an instructor in the program, in Joan Leegant's *Seekers in the Holy Land*, and in Dan Gutstein's *Jerusalem*. Other contributors to this edition focus on issues of identity (Karen Marron's *Crêpe -Café de Paris*), relationships (Joanna Chen's *By the Time You Read This*, Yael Unterman's *The Woman in the White Headscarf*), and loss (Galina Vromen's *In Search of a Good Woman*). The dynamism and diversity of the program's poets and writers are evident in the collage of works selected for this edition: Middle Eastern, African American, Modern Israeli, Indian, and Yiddish culture all have a place here, creating a fascinating mosaic of voices.

Passing Through is a theme open to endless interpretation, and I believe that, read together, these works express something of the nature of our complex, ambivalent relationships to place, to history, to the events of our lives and times, even to the possibilities contained in a single moment.

Enjoy.

Janice Weizman

This Is It

Gerald Stern

It is my emotions that carry me through Lambertville, New Jersey, sheer feeling – and an obscure detour- that brings me to a coffee shop called “This Is It” and a small New Jersey clapboard with a charming fake sign announcing it to be the first condemned building in the United States and an old obese collie sitting on the cement steps of the front porch begging forgiveness with his red eyes. I talk to the coughing lady for five minutes, admire her sign, her antique flag, her dog and share her grief over the loss of the house next door, boarded up forever, tied up in estates, surrounded by grass, doomed to an early fire.

Everyone is into my myth! The whole countryside is studying weeds, collecting sadness, dreaming of odd connections and no place more than Lambertville will do for ghosts to go through your body or people to live out their lives with a blurred vision. The old woman is still talking. She tells me about her youth, she tells me about her mother’s ganglia and how the doctor slammed a heavy Bible down on her watery wrist, scattering spoons and bread crumbs and turning over little tin containers of alyssum and snapdragon. She tells me about the curved green glass that is gone forever. She tells me about her dog and its monotonous existence.

Ah, but for sadness there are very few towns like Lambertville. It drips with grief, it almost sags from the weight. I know Frackville, Pa., and Sandusky, Ohio, and I know coal chutes, empty stores and rusty rivers

but Lambertville is special, it is a wooden stage set,
a dream-ridden carcass where people live out serious lives
with other people's secrets, trying to touch with their hands
and eat with their cold forks, and open houses with their keys;
and sometimes, on a damp Sunday, they leave the papers on the front
porch
to walk down York Street or Buttonwood Street
past abandoned factories and wooden garages,
past the cannon with balls and the new band shell,
past the downtown churches and the antique shops,
and even across the metal plates on the Delaware River
to stinking New Hope, where all their deep longing
is reduced to an hour and a half of greedy buying.

I crawl across the street to have my coffee at the low counter,
to listen to the noise of the saws drifting through the open window
and to study the strange spirit of this tar paper café
stuck on a residential street three or four blocks
from Main and Bridge where except for the sudden windfall
of the looping detour it would be relegated forever
to the quiet company of three or four close friends
and the unexpected attention of a bored crossing guard
or exhausted meter man or truck driver.
I listen to the plans of the three teen-age businessmen
about to make their fortune in this rotting shack
and walk – periodically- past the stainless steel sink
to take my piss in the misplaced men's room.
I watch the bright happy girls organize their futures
over and around the silent muscular boys
and I wait, like a peaceful man, hours on end,
for the truck out back to start, for the collie to die,
for the flies to come, for the summer to bring its reckoning.

This Is It first appeared in This Time, New and Selected Poems, W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.

Grandmother with Mink Stole, Sky Harbor Airport, Phoenix, Arizona, 1959

Michael Collier

It rode on her shoulders
flayed in its purposes of warmth and glamour.

Its head like a small dog's and its eyes
more sympathetic than my mother's eyes' kindness

which was vast. Four paws for good luck
but also tiny sandbags of mortification and ballast,

and in the black claws a hint of brooch or clasp.
Secured like that the head could loll and the teeth

in the snout's fixed grin was the clenched "Oh, shit!"
of road kill askew in the gutter. This she wore

no matter the weather and always, always,
when she stepped from the plane and paused,

at the top of the rolling stairs, she fit her hand
to her brow against the glare of concrete and desert,

not a white glove's soft salute but a visor
that brought us into focus. Mother and Father waving first.

Then oldest to youngest, dressed in our Easter best,
we were prodded to greet her, she who gripped the hot,

gleaming rail, set her teeth in the mink's stiff grin
and walked through the waterless, smokeless mirage between us.

She who wore the pelt, the helmet of blue hair
and came to us mint and camphor scented, more strange

than her unvisited world of trees and seasons,
offering us two mouths, two sets of lips, two expressions:

the large, averted one we were meant to kiss and the other
small, pleading, that if we had the choice, we might choose.

This poem was originally published in TriQuarterly, Winter 2010.

The Petting Zoo in Tekoa

Sherri Mandell

Surely this rooster deserves our attention.
Direct in its call and carriage:
brown weather-beaten
feathers, red comb
and wattle.

Not that regal peacock
whose neon plumes
unfurl and undulate
like the bells on a belly dancer's
costume when she shimmies.

The peacock refuses
the rooster passage
unfolds his plumage--
a crown
of repeating eyes.

But look, from behind
he is almost ordinary--
stalks of plain feathers
and a plump backside.
You could never guess

how grand his entrance.
How ridiculous the sublime.
Moses was told he could see God
only from behind.
I'm glad that old man

didn't get to enter the land of Israel.

This way it shimmered for him
like the bouquet of peacock feathers
I carried in a New York taxi.
The driver eyed them

in the rear view
mirror. When I paid him,
he asked for a feather and instructions
on how to water it.
How sublime the ridiculous.

Rosa Parks dreams

E. Ethelbert Miller

Rosa Parks dreams about
a bus in Jerusalem. A headless
woman sits in her seat. There is no
driver today. The top of the bus
is missing. On the road a line
of bodies segregated from the living.
They sleep against a twisted metal
frame. Wild flowers stare from
a field.

*Taken from How We Sleep on the Nights We Don't Make Love
(Curbstone Press, 2004). Copyright 2004 by E. Ethelbert Miller.*

Is there a doctor here?

Ira Director

the white haired woman's pale face turned red

she slumped
dropped from the chair

the poet stopped mid poem

her husband knelt in the hot sun crying
as people moved closer

I had the good sense to move away
and get another piece of the apple cake
which I cut horizontally to get a slice
filled with apple pieces

after loading it
with homemade *tehena* I took two bites

"lucky I've already read"
embarrassed by my own thoughts
I phoned Debbie "How terrible. Have you read yet?"

I stuffed the rest in my mouth
licked my drippy fingers
chewed slowly as I went back
hoping no one would notice

a doctor was administering CPR
a young teen was crying in the john

perhaps the old woman's granddaughter

“she wasn’t even wearing a hat” I heard

later in the shade
as the poets began reading again

I brought her an orange
then thought
as the ambulance drove her away

staying alive is mostly luck

what if that doctor
hadn’t wanted to hear
student poetry that day

that evening over coffee
I realized
I was likely
the only other person
who “knew” CPR

so the old lady
had two chances today

though the doctor probably
also saved me
from finishing this day
with a pair of dead lips
pressed to mine
as I tried desperately
to remember
the right steps
from that course
20 years ago

Down the Rabbit Hole

Miriam Green

Alice is free-falling past the present
wondering what's to become of her
and how she'll prepare for next week.
The kids have a school trip, and she
has to pack for vacation.
She's packing in her head,
maybe take the larger sizes,
she's bound to grow with all the food they'll serve.
And who will feed Dinah, her paws bandaged
after falling off the neighbor's trellis.

Alice is so far in the future, she doesn't notice
she's about to crash.
The crying and the self pity will come later,
each change to her appearance a
cascade of uncertainty,
pushed and pulled by haughty friends.

Maybe there is no present, just life
getting away from her.
She's always chasing after the rabbit.
Not the twisted Hatter or the grinning cat,
not the foolish queen or her puny husband,
not even the pepper and the near deaths
can wake her.
It is not in her hands. It never was.

Jerusalem

Dan Gutstein

Dr. Sylvia does want some sunscreen. She says, “The hand of Moses. The windmill. The Mount of Olives. David’s walls like stones at the knees of the Ottomans.” Dr. Sylvia’s contempt for misinformation. Her delicate eyebrows and her stern cigarette. “The Dome of the Rock. Jaffa Road.” A money changer already fanning his brown face in the August shade.

*

Dr. Sylvia knows where an Arab girl, who may have a lightning bolt tattooed on her shoulder, serves a good hummous and a good phul. Friday afternoon. “We no speak Hebrew,” she says. “No English. We no speak.” The mosques empty and the streets, electric. Mules. A Mercedes Benz surrounded by women in headscarves. The men in white hats, long white shirts, and white pants so numerous we must step off the cobble, up, to let the fifteen or twenty minutes of them pass.

*

The tile vendor selling maps. The licorice of the candy merchant. A guide loitering, knee bent, sole to wall, on a loose corner of the souk. “Come,” says Dr. Sylvia. “I no get us lost.” Only mourners and pilgrims and Stations of the Cross. A soldier. Soldiers in a joke-telling circle. “We no get lost in this alley.” How shadow turns the corner with us.

*

The Palestinian boy giggles. “Arbah-ah,” he says, in Hebrew, clutching an instamatic camera behind his back. “Four shekel; three.” Dr. Sylvia lights a cigarette. I dig into my pocket. The silly prayer I wrote last night unfolds a few coins that splatter the macadam on accident. “Thank you,” the boy shouts, after a third lunge. No flowers in his

teeth. His clean fingernails while the dirty flashbulb pocks. Dr. Sylvia almost defending herself in the photograph.

*

We turn another corner. Dr. Sylvia leads me up another rampart. The noise of the Old City falls down, a breathless echo that cannot keep a date. The two of us like a woman stepping out of her dress. Dr. Sylvia knocks on the wrong door. She knocks on the proper door. When the tall Ethiopian monk answers, she explains to him in his own language that we wish to rest. To dwell beside him for a few moments. And in stepping aside he admits us into a rooftop gardens. A small paradise.

*

“You know where you are?” says Dr. Sylvia, seating us in the shade of an oleander. “On top of the church. The Holy Sepulchre. Where Jesus rise from the vault.” The monk, robed in a thick brown sack, sweeps dirt beside the stall in which he might sleep. The peaceful heat doubles back on slight currents. There can be goodness. There can be a life enhancing return. There must be time.

*

Dr. Sylvia’s occasional grin. The Armenian Quarter. Gethsemane. The Church of the Redeemer. Her graduate students must come here. “They no find the armory, let’s say, or Damascus Gate, they no get passing grade. They no get diploma.” Dr. Sylvia says, “Feh.” She will now take me to the Wailing Wall. Beauty spots on her hands.

*

“You are Dutch,” says the black hat. “You are not American but you are Dutch you are Dutch. Cover your head, sir, before the Lord!” The black hat blocks my path to the wall. “There is a problem?” he says. Dr. Sylvia has drifted back into the shade beside a long staircase, her cigarette twinkling, a solitary constellation. Sometimes the Palestinian boys throw rocks at the Jewish worshippers here. Then the soldiers or

the police must reply. "For a small donation," says the black hat. "There is a problem?"

*

"Why you no put that in the Wailing Wall," says Dr. Sylvia. "On account of some black hat?" But I have already lit my silly prayer with Dr. Sylvia's lighter. "Suit yourself." We sit in the courtyard of the hotel at the American Colony. Even the rug merchant shivers, in August, in Jerusalem, the cool dry air. "I think the boy catch my good side," says Dr. Sylvia, holding the instamatic photograph beside the small fire in the ashtray. For the dead, I wrote the prayer. The paper blackened, lifting. May my words peak where the day dims.

*

Thick, oily brushes of nightfall. Lights roll up and down the hills outside the Old City. Like waves. Or warnings. Calm can mean an interval. Time between the second and third stars. A far ceiling. Neutrality. Reason itself stealing among those who refuse to bow. In the fist of the rocky heights, in the gold of the song, in the moment before sleep catches.

Jerusalem first appeared in the South Loop Review at Columbia College in Chicago.

Journey

Annael Jonas

The bus shoots forth and lands in the station
like a bullet piercing through the urban flesh.
from here, a carpet of soft grey concrete
collapses into cascading stairs which spill
into a pool of parking lot
with the relieved, dry sigh
of proximity to home.
Sometimes the city directs me
East, towards the thickets.
The awful towers enclose neighbors
and mothers, waiting for hours
with dry mouths.
But the thickets are the scissors
Snipping my homeward journey
into measured footsteps,
evenly divided; a solemn march
into the heather regions.
Dry grasses like lances
scraping the armor off the leg,
burdocks scarring elbows
and the heart gags fitfully.
The trail winds into wilderness,
pebbles growing into
great ancient slabs of
chalk rock,
the clearing in sight.
If only dawn could see me now,
etching my growth across the yellow thickets,
gathering dry, prickly raspberries
with my trousers
until I reach the clearing cathedral,

desist among the bracken
and eat my sandwich,
a hopeful goodbye
that wasn't born yet
to the awful towers
and the mothers.

The Heron

Andrea Moriah

I sleep,
hospital blanket pulled over my mouth
to keep my lips from drying,
tucked under my nose,
so the sweet smell of laundry soap
can overpower the chemical stench of my body.

Here is the heron again
perched on a leafless winter branch
stiff head feathers slicked back,
one eye fixed on me.

Here am I, naked, in the reservoir again,
its clay sides red-marbled as dead meat
like earth in a painting by Courbet.

The heron nods offstage
which triggers a gush of water into the pit.
It fills so quickly that soon
I am dog-paddling
to keep my head above water.

I gouge my fingers and toes into the red clay,
heave myself up over the edge.

At dawn, one eye opens onto Ibrahim's hand
encircling my biceps as he draws blood
from the catheter in the crook of my arm.
The one time in the day
I feel a human touch.

By The Time You Read This

Joanna Chen

By the time you read this
it will be late
and I will be far away,
moving through corridors
that make up my life.
Or perhaps

you will be far away
and I will be here,
with my dog,
my cups of coffee,
my fears.
Or maybe

You and I will both
be here, with our
lives and our loves,
far away, and
you will peer over my
shoulder as you pass.

A Great Miracle Happened Here

Jillian Jones

We're just shooting the shit, basking in candlelight like yellow daydream jelly donut fiends, when I say, This time, I mean to write pastoral. Sara, she's my roommate, she fingers our last little pile of *agorot* and takes a too-nervous spin and draws *nun* and says, Pastoral? I seem to recall something about bears. Not bears, I tell her, huffing into four nights worth of dwindling miracles. A shepherd, or shepherd equivalent. I love it when you talk dirty to me, she says. We snort into the flames and picture Galway Kinnell in our Givatayim dump, waxing fancy about cat piss tang and cigarette butts littering the playground parking lot sandbox outside, where one day I swear I saw a fly land in a baby's open mouth. Write about our smelly tree, Sara says, spinning the dreidel something fierce. I don't know what she means, but she and Yossi exchange smiles and he coughs into his fist. *The Israeli carob tree grows up to ten meters tall. Its handsome crown is broad and spherical, supported by a thick trunk with brown rough bark. Male flowers produce a surprisingly characteristic odor, often mistaken for semen. The fruit from an Israeli carob tree can be elongated or compressed, straight or curved, and thickened at the sutures. The ripe pods eventually fall to the ground and are eaten by mammals.* I see it now, this back door vision, this fetid monster gnarled over in surprise at itself. And I mean to laugh at the half-spent

splendor, me coming here in search of milk
and honey, and me just coming here instead, but
it's my turn to spin; I get *pe*.

Poems by Marcela Sulak

Angels

1.

If the groans and shrieks of martyrs, the shofar cry of Yom Kippur really rend the heavens, then I picture it like this: clouds are ripped as if by swords, and angels spill and spread across the world.

Once a rabbi fled from Poland
to the tranquil town of Tzfat, enduring unutterable privations
and fear along the way. As the Galilean hills lift and lull
his tired feet, an angel infestation fills his red, chapped ears.
Their voices chirrup from synagogue
to synagogue, he can
almost glimpse their ragged white beneath the turquoise doors,
like lice beneath a skirt of lettuce. And so he leaves for Tiberius
complaining that the angels had kept him up at night.

2.

My grandparents sheltered their hearty human bonds
in a wood-framed rental with a wrap-around porch.
Each of six dark daughters through the years
reduced the sum of chaos by a suitcase as they left.

Though loathe to do it, grandpa dies and leaves
grandma alone. She says she found angels
skittering across soup plates, wrecking havoc
on the crystal. When asked if she would like

to die and join her true love, my grandmother
replies, not unless he stops arguing
with God in the next room. And how

he loves her still, we thought.

3. **The Antimatter of Angels**

Antimatter is not found naturally on Earth, except very briefly in small quantities ... because... when matter and antimatter come into contact they annihilate.

Maybe I'm not hurt enough,
or maybe I'm just standing
on the wrong side of eternity.
My only bloodless visitor
comes when I am all alone.
I hope I never know
if his infinity of *no* can really
blot out God the way
he whispers that it can,
just as his colorless shadow
snuffed the closet light
when I was still a child,
how his unbearable approach
silenced my ears; the world
stopped as the windows quaked
against his fingerless whorl.

An Olive, A Letter

Summary of Genevra Fonseca's Inquisition records, Portugal 1642

There are visions that are dangerous:
purple, blue, or magenta ships
sailing in a cloudless sky

your deceased mother
has taken you to heaven
your sisters are awaiting
in the presence of unmarried men

And actions from which you should refrain:
singing and playing the lute
taking pleasure with great mirth
in the making of new clothes

And items that arouse envy or suspicion
a length of fine green cloth,
smuggled fishes lightly fried
a length of purple cloth
the scent of cinnamon

There are phrases which cannot save you:
spinning wheel before a window
famous surgeon husband
tender age

And if you are shown tokens from heaven
an ear of corn

an olive

a letter

Genevra, give them back.
Genevra, say you're sorry.

Comforts of Home

When I buy vegetables I prefer
to be in my country rather than yours
though in my country crescent moon carrots, radish hearts
are not so juicy and fancifully shaped.

But I prefer to find you in a place
your vocabulary carves a secret door
through which I can enter or escape.
Where syntax is not a floodlight on my blinded tongue
negotiating taxis at night.

I prefer to be here, where I don't have to lie,
to say I'm married and my man's
the jealous type. He's with the police,
and my father is the ambassador.
Here I am not a bare field in need of a flag.

Here the way I hold tomatoes, touch a cantaloupe
is just like all the others do
and it is your fingers which are different.
You don't watch me carry my purchases home.
I can stare back. And when I smile
it means whatever I want it to.

Central Park

The important thing is to be burdened with your emptiness
--not as a pregnant woman balancing across the street,
for your emptiness belongs only to you and no one
placed it there. Nor are you like a barrel of rainwater

collecting ripples and images. Nor are you a shadow
or a sun. The necessary thing when you are
standing still is to have a place to go. To have something
that should be done or could be done

or at least begun. Consider when your hands
are gathering up strange letters --and they are prone
to slide--they are not grains or seed or keys to a mystery,
though they are not yours, or to a house or a heart.

Bells are not syllables, slaps are not chrysanthemums.
Dictionaries will give you nothing. There is no language
in your blood, no hurt under your boot heels.
What is gliding on the lake is gliding away,

it is looking for fish and frogs. It cannot speak
to you, nor can the oak that drops its button acorns
and moves its arms in the wind. And the children
walking hand in hand before you in the reeds

are only going home to supper. The sun
is setting. It is only the end of the day.
To remember: it's better not to look for things
or pick them up. Stay out of libraries and away

from electrical outlets, hospital rooms and theatres,
from secretaries, businessmen and all who traffic
in similes, stock, grain, meat, desire, daisies
snails and shipping. Stay out of suitcases,

closets, diaries, milk pails, washing machines,
Beware of stockroom boys, of grandmothers
with their heavy tablets of bread, bakers and their ilk.
And yet, it isn't good to be alone. Not too much alone.

Elegy for Arturo Puente

The brother wants to drop out of fifth grade now Arturo's gone. He's remembering the fisherman speared by a marlin leaping across the boat's stern and wants a manly job.

But Aurelia, the eldest, says no; tells him just thinking is dangerous sometimes, too, like that Greek guy we read about in school—an eagle dropped a tortoise on his bald head,

which, from a distance, looked exactly like a stone. Arturo's death was simple, almost as if nothing happened at all: The car fell from its jack in Peterson's Garage.

A sentence so lucid you can't take it any other way. There must have been a sharp *boom*, the clatter of the jack striking the cement, and, much quieter,

the socket wrench dropping from Arturo's hand. After the funeral the clods of earth scatter, arch, and fall unseen on the casket below. If his mother, his five sisters,

balanced on thin, fuzzy legs, had any sort of premonition the night before he died they didn't say. My friend Isela always dreams the soon-to-be deceased's pulling

flowers from a garden. And when my grandfather died he arrived in his white-and-blue pajamas and brown house shoes to tell me so himself.

The mourners bite into their German chocolate

cake, clutching white paper plates. The ivy
pulls like fingers on the cemetery fence.
What will they do now, we say. The syllables
of Arturo Puente's name, etched into the breath

of the town, slowly begin to fill with
other conversation, the elements begin to lap
the letters on the headstone so they are drifting with dust
over the garages of minimum wage, with pollen

over fruit trees and grain, across the Texas
coast, over the grazing cows to the west, over
the border. The sisters marry, perhaps a little
sooner than they would have otherwise. More

men part the ribs of a fence and squeeze
through. No one believes in victim of
circumstance. Sometimes the rushing coastal wind
stills suddenly, as if the earth had stumbled.

Blemish

If the horizon marks the place
beyond which we can neither see
nor imagine, and you

a dark dot in the middle
or perhaps in the upper left-hand corner
wearing shoes, or barefoot

with the shoes in your hand,
having just removed them
to walk in the sand,

or having just decided to put them on,
do you look up, or out, or
not at all, or in?

Maybe something's
there, and maybe it isn't. It's the form
emptiness spills over, the rim of you,

everything—the shoreline,
the distance, the footprints—
elastic with longing.

Let us praise Braque,
who tried to paint the sensation
of moving around objects

the feeling of the terrain,
the distances between things.
When a plain meets the sky, you

may be walking on the beach,
still you may be the blemish

on a horizon that won't ripen,

holding the place from which one lifts
momentarily given,
momentarily borne, and borne again

and given, and given away, and mercifully,
utterly, and yes, let it be
nothing, let it be

at last.

*These poems were first published in Immigrant, Black Lawrence Press,
2010.*

Seekers in the Holy Land

Joan Leegant

He has chosen Safed because the Kabbalists came here. The streets are hilly, some of the roads rocky—this is what he wants, what he came for, the ancient feeling, the hard-to-get-there feeling—and from time to time he has to pull up on his backpack, shrug each shoulder through his bulky jacket to keep it from slipping and pulling him down into the old stones that pave these streets and could take him under. Though he'd gladly go, that's how much he wants to know this place. He is tired of Jerusalem, tired of his fellow Americans posing at the modern yeshiva, not even a yeshiva, an Institute it calls itself, to attract the university-conscious who need the pretext of a graduate school. As if they were there for a credential, a degree; as if that was what being there was about. He hadn't understood this when he sent in his forms, what did he know, reading the brochure in his apartment in Boston. An immersion in study. He thought the other students would be like him, but they're not. They come to the classes and act like it matters, but really all they want is to have a good time. To get away from their parents or colleges, hang out on Ben Yehuda and meet American girls on exchange programs, and get high and go to Egypt and Petra and then return home after the year and tell their friends they had a mystical experience.

He has found his way from the bus station to the old section of the city, the streets narrow and winding like in the pictures, like in the guidebooks, like in parts of Jerusalem. The weather is like Jerusalem, too. Cold, the altitude, December, and it can be raw, not like home of course but still raw, wet, you never get warm; his roommates are complaining about the heat in their building, on for only certain hours of the day and never enough. So far he is succeeding pretty well in ignoring the tourist busses clogging the narrow streets. And most of those will be pulling out of Safed now because it's Friday afternoon and there's nowhere for the tourists to stay. They'll go to Tiberias or Haifa to the big hotels. Old synagogues and artists in Safed, that's it, a

daytime show, you don't want to be here Friday night, the tour guide would say. Nothing to do. Not even restaurants open.

As if on cue, a charter bus rumbles past him down the hill on its way out of town. Blank faces at the windows, some in those perky cotton hats, faux kibbutz, given free with the tour agency's shoulder bags. Too quiet to be Americans. Probably some guilty Europeans—Danish, Swiss, the ever-present Germans. He catches a woman's eye, knows what she sees: the oversized kippa, the tzitzit fringes dangling, exposed, near his belt, though the hair is too long to be really religious, really Orthodox. But she probably doesn't know that. *Young Jews reclaiming their heritage*, she's thinking. *Isn't that nice*. The bus rounds a curve and disappears, he hears the bounce of the shocks. He sees them all over the country, his parents' age, born after the War, sincere, prosperous-looking people—the old ones, he thinks, wouldn't dare come, or want to. But even these he finds offensive, as if they're atoning; as if boating on the Kinneret or buying ceramic candlesticks for their friends back home were atonement. He's been watching tourists in this country for five months now and likes the Japanese best because he can't understand their language, not a single syllable, and because they seem so game. Jews? What are Jews? Interesting. Let's go see. They seem to know little, unlike the Europeans who know too much. The Japanese women are always wearing the wrong kinds of shoes, high heels or flimsy ladies' sandals, and the men wear formal, pressed pants. They don't know how to dress for the climate or the terrain. Watching them at a war memorial full of rubble or at a dig with its treacherous potholes and insufficiently roped-off areas he wonders if somehow they got to this country by mistake; if they hadn't meant instead to go to Rome or Madrid or some more civilized place, better paved, but got on the wrong plane.

A dumpster juts onto the sidewalk – overflowing plastic bags, a moldy rug – and he steps around it, catches a streak of gray, the wide whine of a cat. The hostel, he's been told, is at the bottom of one of these hilly streets, a ten-minute walk to the synagogue he wants to find. He heard about the synagogue from Aryeh, one of his teachers. A plum piece of intelligence. Not listed in the guidebooks, the tourists don't know about it. *The real thing, sometimes they still do secret*

ceremonies, anointing initiates, those who've learned The Way. They study for years, practice, they're not young. In truth, he knows almost nothing about the mystics, the Seven Sefirot, the Infinite Ein-Sof, the migration of souls, they're only phrases he's read; knows almost nothing about the religion altogether, a juvenile Hebrew School education, a couple of courses in college. But he knows this is where he belongs, in Safed, at this synagogue. He wants to drink from this well, and Aryeh saw it, recognized it, told only him.

At the corner he checks his directions, then shifts the pack and turns right, leaving Arlozorov Street. Behind a cracking stone archway, off a tiny building practically buried in weeds, a man all in white is standing on a porch, eyes closed, silently rocking. A meditation. A flock of birds squawks overhead, and the man opens his eyes. He hurries on. There are probably dozens, maybe hundreds of people concentrating like that at this very moment, right here, the highest elevation in the country, the closest point to heaven. He turns down a side street, passes a florist, its metal shutters pulled closed. He should be on that porch, too, he's wasting his time in Jerusalem.

The street narrows, and it is maze-like where he's walking, winding streets within winding streets. And quiet. Too quiet. Where is the hustle and bustle, the children coming home from school early, the women rushing back from the markets to cook? He passes silent doorways, a few toys left out against the cement buildings—a tricycle, a child's battered wagon—then checks his watch, a fleeting worry he's lost track. Two o'clock. He lifts his wrist to his ear, hears it ticking, squints anyway at a clock through a window in a partially shuttered candy store and confirms the time again: only two. Maybe this is the influence of the Kabbalists, shabbat brought in with silence and contemplation, even the streets paying attention to their breath.

And now he is there, where the hostel is supposed to be. Malachim Street. Street of the Angels. He looks to the top. Arlozorov is at the other end, he has been walking in a circle. There is no number 35. He looks again at the slip of paper, at Aryeh's scrawly handwriting, a crude map of the hostel and the synagogue, a dark circle colored in at each. The synagogue location was from Aryeh but the hostel was in the guidebook. 35 Malachim.

14, 27, 48, 63. He walks the length of it, a short street with mismatched numbers. A car appears at the top, a dusty white Peugeot; he edges up against a building just in time to let it speed past. He combs the street again, looking for a sign—hostel, hotel, pension—spots a battered metal Coca-Cola placard hanging off a single nail, another one for Strauss Ice Cream. But the buildings are shuttered, whatever they are—restaurants, groceries, kiosks—closed. The whole block looks vacated, an aura of having been fled. But Safed is not a city to be fled, not like the towns on the northern border, Kiryat Shmona or Metulla, whose residents routinely go underground.

He has exhausted the little street and also himself. He sits heavily on a stoop, puts his backpack by his feet. His boots are covered in dust, he could write his name across the leather. *Neal Fox*. No weight, no substance. He wants to change it, Naftali or Natan. Maybe Nachum, after the great seer of Bratslav, if he can work up the nerve. He flexes his shoulders, rotates his arms. The pack is too heavy, he could lose the second bottle of water, the camera—what was he thinking? It's shabbat—his three books. Across from him the Coca-Cola sign flutters on its nail. This is not the first time something like this has gone wrong, it happens all the time in this country: busses regularly off schedule, businesses out of business, addresses listed wrong. No one is ever surprised. *Y'hiyeh b'seder*. It'll be all right. He has two hours before sundown. He's twenty-one and strong. There's a hostel somewhere in this city, he just has to find it. The next car, the next passerby—he'll ask.

Meanwhile he pulls one of the water bottles from his pack and drinks. Waits. No cars come. The sky is deepening pink. He knows it's close to three. Shabbat begins at four-thirty.

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She appears at the top of the street, at Arlozorov, blonde, a day-glo orange ski jacket, a pack almost identical to his, only smaller. She's wearing a skirt and knee socks like his sister Carly when Carly was in eighth grade. Only this person is not fourteen.

"Excuse me, can you help me?" she says in Hebrew, an accent he

can't place. "Do you know where is the hostel?"

Her Hebrew, he is certain even from this little bit, is better than his—the speed, the pronunciation, his gut sense that whatever her native tongue, she doesn't want to use it—and to show her he knows she's only a tourist, why is she trying Hebrew, he answers in English, "Do you speak English?"

"Oh. Sorry," she says. "I am looking for the youth hostel." She says *looking* like *looking*, that extra *ooh*, and he finds it appealing. The fine blonde hair, the pretty blue eyes, the earnest face, the accent, the knee socks: she is like Heidi, like the cast from *The Sound of Music*, like Gretel in an opera he once saw on TV. Like a German.

"Yeah, well, me too," he says, picking up his bottle.

She glances around, confused. "It's not here?"

"Doesn't seem to be." He takes another swig, puts the bottle away. He's seen these tourists, too. Young Europeans traveling alone, criss-crossing the world in six months or a year with a single small backpack. A girl from Finland once showed him the contents of hers. A quarter of a washcloth, neatly cut, a hand towel, one skirt, one pair of pants, one sweater, one shirt, one undershirt, two pairs of thin socks, two pairs of underpants, a half-size toothbrush, and two tampons – enough until you get somewhere to buy, she said, oddly the only thing she commented on. Often he meets them on the way back from Turkey or Egypt or Iran, Israel a modern relief.

"Perhaps the guidebook had it wrong," she says, looking up to Arlozorov. "Perhaps it's not Malachim but HaPalmach or Rimonim, the next ones over," she says, turning, scanning, her street pronunciations polished, studied, expert.

"Perhaps." He folds his hands, looks past the hem of her skirt, which is eye level from where he's sitting, and wonders about the socks. Is it for comfort? Or did someone on the bus tell her to put on a skirt, slip it on over her pants, then take the pants off, the rules of modesty, in religious sections Jewish women don't wear pants. She would respect local customs. A seasoned traveler, no doubt, like the Finn.

"Aren't you going to look?" she says.

He hadn't gotten that far. But now that she's here, so efficient, he

feels compelled to justify his inertia. "I was considering the situation," he says. "Thinking it through."

She makes a little *Oh* with her lips, then goes to the bottom of Malachim. Something makes him leave his pack and follow her, and they comb five streets. He knows where she got her Hebrew, has seen people like her in the ulpan studying with the new immigrants and Jewish students like him. They're good with languages, already know English and French in addition to German, and are pleasant to everyone, the Russian women want to bring them home and feed them. Some of them are Christians, there to proselytize, to get the Jews to join them so they can have their Second Coming, the Jews are holding it up. But you don't find that out for weeks, even months.

They walk through open gates, knock at unmarked doors. A lone pedestrian crosses the street and ignores them when they try to ask.

Back at Malachim they compare slips of paper. Hers is also in English; she copied it from the same guidebook.

"So the guidebook is mistaken," she declares, studying her paper. Her pack seems featherlight; she has not yet put it down, while his remains on the stoop.

"Evidently." He makes a show of looking at his watch, pulling back his jacket cuff, wiping off the face. "If you hurry you can catch a bus to Tiberias, stay there instead."

She looks up. "What good will that do me?"

"It's a place to stay. There are two or three hostels there." He makes a sweeping gesture. "Unlike here."

"I will find."

He shrugs and goes toward his pack.

"And you?" she says, behind him.

He hoists the straps. "I guess I will find, too."

"Where do you need to be? Where are you going in Safed?"

He will not tell her. He wants his synagogue to be his own discovery. To be, for once, in a place unsullied by outsiders, by spectators there to gawk and paste the experience into some mental scrapbook. *Look how pious, how devoted.* He knows of course that he's an outsider too, but he will do his best to fit in, be inconspicuous. "I want to be near one of the synagogues," he says, shifting the pack. It

feels like there are bricks inside, extra weight accumulated since he first set it down, as if the cement of the building has seeped in through the canvas.

“Me, too.”

“Yeah, well, good luck,” he says, and starts to walk away.

“Which one?” she calls. “Which synagogue?”

He stops, thinks quickly and turns around. Her hair has fanned out with the wind, a yellow curtain against the deepening rose of the sky. “You want to know which one to visit? Go to the Joseph Caro or the Ari, they’re famous, everyone goes there. They’re in all the guidebooks.” He points to the top of the street, to Arlozorov. “Go to any of the shops, they’ll tell you where.”

She stares a moment longer. He has finessed her, that’s not what she meant. She wanted to know where he was going.

But she knows she’s been dismissed. She’s well brought up, or perhaps more timid than he thought. She straightens up, her backpack almost floating, as if filled with air, gives a small comradely wave, starts up Malachim. He moves off in the other direction, then turns. In her orange jacket, her back to him, she looks like a frail bird.

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At the only grocery still open the proprietor tells him of a woman who takes in guests, Mrs. Baghdadi at 36 Montefiore. He loves these surnames, Baghdadi, heavy with place and history, while what does he have to show for himself? Fox, whatever gave it life, Folkshtein, Foxman, Feuerstein, long since chopped off at the root.

He buys a small jar of peanut butter, the three rolls left in the bin, the last two bourekas, a litre of apple juice, a container of cottage cheese. Somewhere in his pack he hopes there’s a spoon and a plastic knife. He was told the hostel served breakfast and would provide a cold supper Friday night if given enough notice, but now he’s on his own. He thanks the proprietor excessively, grateful the store is still open this close to candlelighting, and the man gives a lengthy reply. Neal’s Hebrew isn’t good enough to fully understand, though he suspects it is the story of the man’s life – he picks up something about

Yemen, a wife, nine children – and he waits for a pause while the man collects his thoughts, then nods vigorously and says a too-loud shabbat shalom and heads out.

It's turned cold, a chilly damp that feels like rain. Two men hurry past, their heads down, hair wet, and he sees then the tiny sign on a low stone building. *Mikveh*. For men. He's just recently found out about such a thing, men immersing themselves before holy days. For the truly devout, every week. He should do this, why hadn't he heard of it before? An old man is closing up, locking the gate, and Neal turns left, berates himself. Next time. Next time he'll come earlier, be smarter, better prepared. At 36 Montefiore there's a gate opening onto a thorny courtyard. He picks his way over broken stones and dead geranium petals, the bright red decayed to black along the edges, as if burned, and finds the door, knocks.

The woman who answers is like from a lithograph: shrunken, kerchiefed, wizened. He asks for Mrs. Baghdadi and the old lady shakes her head. Not here? Wrong name? Did he misunderstand? Immediately she begins talking in rapid-fire Hebrew. He can't understand a word and pain is pulling across his shoulders from the weight of his pack.

"One hundred shekels," the woman says, interrupting herself and holding out her hand.

"One hundred?" The hostel cost thirty-five, about nine dollars.

"One hundred," she repeats. When he hesitates she says, her Hebrew louder as if he were deaf instead of American, "All of shabbat. Tonight, tomorrow, you can stay until after dark, or the next morning. Room is clean."

What choice does he have? He gives her the money, follows her to a room at the end of a long hall, the dense smell of cumin and cinnamon hovering above them. Inside are four bare beds cramped together, two of them perpendicular so that someone's feet would be up against someone else's head. He takes the one closest to the wall in case she's still doing business later, guaranteeing privacy at least on one side.

The woman appears with a sheet and a pillow. The word for blanket has suddenly evaporated from his already rudimentary

vocabulary.

“More?” he manages, smoothing the top of the bed. She shakes her head, obviously annoyed. What could he want, more what?

He puts his arms around himself and pretends to shiver. “Something for cold,” he says.

She leaves, returns with a rubber thing shaped like a kidney. A hot water bottle, he presumes. He sinks onto the bed. The springs creak like an old song. There is always his jacket.

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The synagogue is dark. He was not expecting floodlights, but he knows before even trying the door that no one is there.

Yet it is a synagogue, the synagogue. It's got the two lion heads on the gate that Aryeh told him about, the broken arch at the street, the two Stars of David carved over the door, one above the other. Even the address is right: 18 Eliyahu HaNavi. *Do you know who is Eliyahu?* Aryeh said, eyes flaming, drawing the little map. *Carried to heaven on a fiery chariot, his horse went through the sun, better than Icarus!* When Aryeh told him this, Neal felt himself shaking: this is what he wants, to fly into the center and merge with that heat, with that sun. Isn't that why he came, not just to Safed but to the country altogether, to find something true, a way? His Jewish friends at home were doing yoga, Buddhism; one was considering becoming a priest. Because what was there in America if you were Jewish? Temples with health clubs? Fundraisers? Rabbis like at his parents' synagogue, Rabbi Shore, preoccupied with building campaigns, numbers, membership rolls? Or, on the other side, rules, fetishistic rules, a black and white orthodoxy. But for the soul, what was there?

He tries the door one more time, then walks around the low building, looks in through two small windows. Prayerbooks stacked up, a table in the middle, next to it a wooden ark, chairs in a disorganized semi-circle. And books, papers, lamps, stray articles of clothing cluttering the corners.

Perhaps he is early. He thinks not, he has passed several synagogues on his way and they've all started. But perhaps here they

begin later, do it differently. At the Ari and Joseph Caro they have to toe the line, be routine, otherwise they lose their guidebook listings and, with them, American dollars. Ones and fives dropped into the shammes's wooden bowl on the way out after the tours on weekdays, loose change if the tourists are feeling cheap or unsatisfied. He's heard about these shammeses, toothless old men who don't wash, shuffle in and out. Ancients who wanted to be disciples, initiates, who are still hoping. They sweep and clean the toilets, and when the tourists come they give the men little cardboard hats like pyramids, the women bits of lace, and suffer with the wooden bowl for donations, murmuring, head down, from Psalms.

He glances around the courtyard, then to the neighboring buildings, shadows and candles in the windows, music, a female singer, Ofra Haza on someone's CD. There is no place to sit. He leans with his back to the building, then slides down, hunches up against the concrete. The ground is rocky and damp. He takes off his jacket, sits on it, hugs himself for warmth.

But this too is cold. He puts the jacket back on, searches his pockets for something to put between himself and the ground—a hat, gloves, a map, anything, where is his backpack when he needs it?—and, empty-handed, leans back, shuts his eyes, and tells himself to concentrate on his breath, on the drifting music, on the descending blanket of dusk. To allow contentment to spread within, that he is where he wants to be, not in Jerusalem for a noisy shabbat with his roommates and the girls they met from the School for Overseas Students, the pickup scene they will all flock to later, downtown. And not in Boston where he wouldn't be having shabbat at all.

He is hungry. His breath is not holding his attention. He tastes the bland cottage cheese and the doughy roll he managed to down before walking over, wishes he had a candy bar. And then there is the German girl with her blue eyes and expert Hebrew wanting to know where he was going, probably doing penance for her SS grandparents, or a proselytizer wanting to convert him. Interlopers, they can't leave the Jews alone, even in their own country. As if the Crusades and the Inquisition weren't enough. And the old lady at Mrs. Baghdadi's. He was ripped off, should have bargained, when will he learn that in this

country everything is open to negotiation?

He opens his eyes. His pants are damp. The courtyard is a blue-ish black. At the edge of the property is a bench sitting amid tangled vines. How could he have missed it?

He dries the seat of his pants as best he can and walks to the bench. It's stone, and cold, the vines reaching as if trying to touch it, but it's better than the ground. The sky is turning to night. From where he sits the synagogue is disappearing into darkness.

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In his dream the men are singing *L'cha Dodi*. There are fifteen or twenty of them, all old, sitting in the semi-circle of chairs. When, at the last stanza, they stand and turn to the door to bow and welcome the Sabbath Bride, she comes in, still in her knee socks and skirt and the orange jacket. Her yellow hair gives off a shimmering light, and she smiles, radiant—Meira, they call her, *radiance*—and while they sing, she moves to the center, next to the ark, and takes off her clothes. First the jacket, then the skirt, then a pair of pants hidden beneath, then the sweater, the shirt, the undershirt, the two pairs of underpants, the knee socks, a second set inside them, and last, slipping out of her, the two tampons, pristine and smooth and white. At that, the men finish the song and move en masse, graceful and slow, as if in a ballet, and surround her, their eyes closed, their faces turned upward, and inhale slowly and deeply. She is a vapor, a white wind, a genie uncorked, floating inside the circle, and the men stand, enraptured, breathing in again and again until they have taken in all there is, and all that's left of her are the clothes lying in an orange heap on the floor.

He opens his eyes. The courtyard is black. He is horrified. The European—what European? the German!—as the Sabbath Bride! What is she doing in his dream, in his shabbat, in the most unsullied synagogue in Safed! She has no right. The Nazi, the Jew-killer, masquerading as the messenger of shabbat. She has polluted his mind; worse, she is standing naked before the most pious of men, men who'd sooner die than have to look at an unclothed woman.

His hands are numb, and he rubs them together, then runs them

over his face. And there, again, he sees, under his palms, the heap of clothes, the naked girl—soft, white, blonde. The dream is continuing but now is no longer a dream but a living thing, and he cannot stop watching. The men are smiling now at the girl, who is not vapor but flesh. She begins to dance, a slow undulating movement in the center of the circle, revealing herself, parting her legs, and the men stare, breathless, then begin to touch themselves through their clothes, their hands moving up and down, up and down, preparing to enter her.

He is appalled; he has to stop the dream, stop the reel! He gets up from the bench and shakes his head violently from side to side, then his hands, as if he might shake the girl loose, send her flying, then makes for the gate, groping along spindly vines, a thin tree, trips once, twice, hits something hard with his foot. A stone wall. He feels his way, finds the entrance, pushes himself out onto the path leading to the street.

Light. He stops, catches his breath. Shadows move in the windows of the buildings. He has no idea what time it is. Under a streetlamp he checks his watch, four-forty, not possible, the time he arrived at the synagogue, listens for ticking. Silence. He hurries back to Mrs. Baghdadi's. The front door is unlocked. In the hall he smells not cinnamon and cumin but roasted meat, sweet peppers, apples. He is famished. But whoever ate and whenever the meal was, it is now long since over because the apartment is dark. If he is alone in his room he will eat another roll or one of the bourekas, it will help him sleep.

But he is not alone. Two of the other beds are taken. They have been pushed together, the blankets spread across both – two men, two women, one of each, he has no idea, because it is too dark to tell. He goes out, finds his way to the toilet. There is no light. He does his business, washes his hands and face, returns, and in his clothes, lies down on his bed. Something cushiony meets his face. A blanket. He takes off his shoes, his jacket, his pants, shoves them under the bed with his backpack, and covers himself. After a few minutes he feels himself growing calmer, beginning to drift off, his terrible dream receding. Though all night he is stirred out of sleep again and again by the murmuring of coupling, unidentifiable sounds neither high nor low, three, four, five times, rising from the other side of the room.

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They are gone. And so is his backpack.

In the bright light of morning he finds his pants under his bed, checks the pockets. His wallet is there, the contents intact. His apartment key is safe, mixed in with his change.

He is hungry. In his jacket pocket he finds a package of peanuts and eats them quickly, washes away the dryness with water cupped in his hand at the bathroom sink. He smoothes back his hair, searches for toothpaste, finds none and rinses his mouth again.

Outside, the sky is winter white, and it's late; everywhere, the morning services have already begun. He checks his watch, then remembers, hurries off in the direction of the Joseph Caro and the Ari. The trip needn't be a total loss, surely they are fine places, who is he to judge. But as he nears the street he should turn down, he finds himself walking in another direction, toward Eliyahu. He'll just check; maybe they don't meet Friday night, have only a morning minyan. *Hidden, obscure*, Aryeh whispered.

He takes the last part of the street in a run, can see into the courtyard and through the windows, and yes! There is movement inside. He is so lucky! Everything is going as it should, even his backpack. He is released from its burden, and isn't that a sign, the material world weighing him down? Confirmation that he's doing what he must, that in Safed he is on the right path.

Outside the synagogue he catches his breath, straightens his jacket, then softly opens the door so as not to disturb. The men are standing in a tight semi-circle in front of the chairs, twelve, fifteen of them, their white tallises over their heads. Perhaps it is the silent amidah. The prayerbooks are up front. He waits to see the men moving, rocking with their prayers, murmuring, so he can walk up, get a book. But the men are still, so close together their tallises form a giant curtain.

A rustling, a soft shuffling. There is movement on the other side, someone inside the circle. It is the ceremony, there is an initiate. He can't believe his good fortune, can't wait to tell Aryeh. He was so right

to come back.

He tiptoes to the ring of huddled men. One moves a hand, and he glimpses between the curtain of cloth into the opening.

It is she, the girl. She is standing in the middle, a huge tallis over her shoulders reaching all the way to the floor, her eyes closed.

"She is a German!" he shouts. "A child of Nazis!"

The men turn, and he sees her fully now, the skirt, those socks, the orange jacket visible through the white cloth, absurd, preposterous. Even more preposterous than the socks. "How can she be one of them? One of you! You have to be old, you have to be Jewish! She's a proselytizer, a usurper! She took our lives, our histories, now she wants our Path, our Way! She cannot have it!"

"Anyone can have it!" the men shout. "It is open to all! All with a pure heart, all who cleave unto heaven with humility and awe!"

"But she wants to destroy us!"

"Yes!" There are thirty, fifty, a hundred men, with ancient faces and modern faces, bearded and clean-shaven, forty years old and sixty years old and two hundred years old, all merging and blending. "She is your enemy, your hatred! She is everything you despise and judge and fear!"

The floor is shaking, the room loosening from its foundations. It is dark, and the center is spinning. It is the girl, she is transforming, melting, whirling before him. Now she is Mrs. Baghdadi, now the Yemenite proprietor, now an SS man, a Crusader on a white horse swinging a giant cross. She is his parents, Rabbi Shore, Aryeh, the other Americans at the Institute. "You must merge with *all* worlds!" the voices thunder. "*This* is the unity of One-ness! Not with God but with your enemy. Not with some old man in heaven but with your judgment. With all that you despise and demean and diminish and pity! You must merge with the All That Divides You!"

The girl melts, re-forms, melts again. She is a lion, an eagle, a cyclone whirling red, orange, yellow. The center is a blinding, scorching light. Neal buries his face in his arms. He will be burned and his eyes will be seared.

"Neal! Neal!"

A thin reed amid the thunder. It is she, that accent, that voice. She

knows his name and is calling him. She wants to save him.

“Neal! Neal!”

He lifts his head, looks. She is a pillar of flame hurling toward him, a giant furnace. She will take him to the sun—she *is* the sun—and will leave him there.

“Neal!” he hears again, and understands. *Kneel!* She is commanding him to get down.

It is the fury of heaven, and he scrambles to the floor and presses his face into the stone, squeezes his eyes shut and cries into the foundations for mercy, prays he will not be consumed.

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There are noises. Busses, car radios. He is on the floor, his skin sticky with dried sweat. A wave of Led Zeppelin floats by. He pulls himself up, looks at the window. Night. Saturday night, the restaurants open, the shops, people selling CDs and silver jewelry from folding tables.

He runs a hand over his hair, then over his face. Stubble, as if days, not hours, have passed. His jacket is torn and his shoes are missing. A bus exhaust belches loudly, there is the powerful squeal of brakes. A charter has parked in front of the courtyard. A large man in a baseball cap motions a parade of middle-aged people down the bus steps and into a line, then leads them up the path and through the gate to the synagogue door.

“Allo? Allo?”

Neal stands in shadow in a corner. The tour guide adjusts his cap, flicks on a light, and motions in his charges. They file in, wait in a cluster in the middle.

“Everyone inside?” the guide booms, his English thick with an Israeli accent. “Come, Mrs. Feld, join us in the center.” The door closes, heels clicking on the floor. “Now, this is the oldest synagogue in Safed, built in the 1490s, recently renovated and open to tourists. Most of it was destroyed in the great earthquake of 1837 but parts survived.” Someone’s flash goes off. A man takes out a handkerchief, blows his nose. The guide glances at the domed ceiling, at the intricate woodwork, and Neal pushes himself further into the shadow. “The

Kabbalists founded this one, too," the guide says, his voice echoing in the cavernous room, "just like the others we passed. You see how the ark faces south rather than east? And this one also has the special Chair of Elijah—can you see? Back there?" Murmurs, more flashes. "So watch out. If you sit there you'll have a baby within a year."

They laugh, make jokes. *What do they put in there, Viagra? Who wants to go first?* They disperse, pick up prayerbooks, examine the carved doors of the ark and look at the decorations on the walls, elaborate framed writings, calligraphed letters snaking up the sides and along the bottoms. Neal tries to shrink into the corner. "It was near here, in a cave in Meron, that Shimon Bar Yochai wrote *The Zohar*," the guide says. He's standing by the ark, the doors now open, two ancient Torahs watching. "Thirteen years it took him. The most famous book of mystical teachings, they study it still. Sit, contemplate, study. Union with God, that's what they wanted."

"Sounds like my son who went to India," one woman says, wandering over to the ark. "Last summer." She runs a hand over the velvet covering of one of the scrolls. Neal flinches as if she were touching him. "Now he meditates all day while on our money he's flunking out of NYU."

"Nu? Shammes!" calls the guide, looking around. "Where's the shammes?" He pivots, then lights on Neal, strides over and snaps something in Hebrew, waves at his baseball cap.

Neal sees on a low shelf near the prayerbooks the box with the cardboard pyramids and lace snippets, goes over and picks it up, hands it to the guide.

"Not me, you fool—to them!" the guide whispers in Hebrew. "Don't you want them to tip?"

Neal shuffles to the Americans and offers the box, his head down. A few take. One woman brushes past him. "Dov," she says, loud, to the guide. "Can you ask the janitor where's the bathroom?"

Neal looks at her. The guide barks something to him, and Neal points to the back, a guess, though he is certain he is right. The woman bumps him with her pocketbook on the way; he smells a trail of cigarette smoke.

"How much longer, Dov?" the man with the handkerchief calls.

"We're starving." Neal goes back to his corner. He is cold, especially his feet. He looks down. His socks are thinner than he thought, and there are holes.

"A few more minutes," the guide says. "As soon as Mrs. Goodman comes out of the bathroom."

"Oh, that Lynn," someone says from the back. "Everywhere we go, a pit stop."

"You think maybe she's pregnant?" someone else calls out, and everyone laughs, maybe she's been here before, has already used the chair. They have all lost interest in the synagogue except one couple who has been studying the walls, looking at the framed texts. They are standing five or six feet from Neal.

"What do you think it is?" the woman says to her husband, pointing at the frame. "Hebrew? Aramaic?"

"I don't know," he shrugs. He tips his head toward Neal. "Ask him."

"He doesn't speak English. And, besides, he's just the janitor."

"Not a janitor," the man says. "The sexton, takes care of the place. Like at the shul your father used to go to. They always know."

The woman smiles quickly at Neal, embarrassed, then calls to the guide. "Dov, do you know what this is?" she says, pointing to the frame.

Dov walks over, looks, then beckons to Neal.

Neal doesn't move.

"Come look," the guide tells him in Hebrew. "Tell them what it is."

Neal opens his palms, shakes his head. He doesn't know and can't speak, not in his terrible Hebrew nor in his perfect English.

"Fool!" the guide whispers, coming closer. "Make busy, make it up! They'll tip! This is what they want. To feel they've been near something old, from the very religious! Something real, something true! You understand?"

Neal inches over to the couple. Behind them Mrs. Goodman closes the bathroom door, complains loudly that the light doesn't work.

The couple stand politely at the frame. Neal looks at it. He has no idea what it is. It's long, four, five paragraphs, and it could be anything. He is ignorant, a stupid Jew who knows nothing, understands nothing. He needs twenty, thirty, fifty years before he will understand a single letter.

“Tefila,” he mutters. It’s a prayer.

“Tefilat ha-derech!” the guide booms, making it up, covering for him. “Prayer for a safe journey. Very good choice, Mrs. Weiss, because now we will continue our journey. Everyone ready?”

They line up like schoolchildren, make jokes about the crazy Israeli drivers, they should all pray good and hard for such a journey. A few talk about dinner, what are they having, Dov—fish? Italian? Someone heard in Safed there’s now even Chinese.

Dov goes to the door, to the head of the line. “Shammes!” he calls, and Neal understands that it’s for him. He walks over, spots the wooden bowl, picks it up. The guide nods. Neal stands by the door with his head bowed, eyes lowered, as the visitors file out, the bills floating down and landing softly on the bottom, the silence punctuated now and then by the clinking of falling coins.

Seekers in the Holy Land appears in *Joan Leegant’s short story collection An Hour in Paradise: Stories* (W. W. Norton, 2003).

For as Long as the Lamp Is Burning

Jon Papernick

The week before, Avshalom Cohen and his aging mother, Miriam, sat drinking tea together in her Rehavia apartment. It was summer, and violin music played through the trees and gardens outside the open kitchen window. In the next building Mr. Herzog scratched out the music that had saved his life at Auschwitz with a deeper sadness than usual, his arthritic hands fumbling across the strings, the bow just missing the right note. Miriam Cohen told her son that Mr. Herzog had fallen on Azza Street on the way home from the *shuk* and had refused, as he had his whole life, to visit a doctor. He was finally ready to meet his wife again in the Great Beyond.

“Such nonsense,” Miriam said. “I know my Hershel is not waiting for me. He has gone to dust and there he will stay.”

“Momma,” Avshalom said for the thousandth time. “Of course Poppa is waiting for you.”

“That’s why he has written my name across the stars,” she said bitterly. “He has forgotten me, left me behind. I will never forget. Never forget.”

Avshalom knew that another one of her crying fits was coming on—whenever she said she would never forget, she wept, tore at her hair, waved her tattooed left arm in her son’s face, cursed at him.

“You were such a good boy, Avshi. As good, maybe, as your brother and sister. And then you left me, too, and moved to Mevaseret with the Sephardi school teacher!”

“It is only a twenty-minute drive,” he said, ignoring the jab at his wife.

“You never visit,” she said. “The only visitors I have are the gestapo and their black dogs gnashing their teeth when I try and sleep.”

“Momma, don’t talk that way. Put it out of your mind.”

“Never!” she said. “I don’t sleep anymore. They are in my room. I can hear them whispering. Last night, I woke up and could not breathe

and I went to the kitchen and someone had snuck in and turned on the gas. I could have died. I couldn't breathe."

"It was just bad dreams and your emphysema," Avshalom said.

"I have no such thing. I can't even pronounce the word. I'm telling you, the Nazi Arabs came to my home. They move things when I am not looking so I can't find them."

He placed his hand on her veined, shaking hand. "Momma, I'm going to leave now."

"Leave!" she said. And then, all at once, Mr. Herzog's lugubrious playing came to an abrupt end.

Avshalom's telephone rang sometime after midnight. He was in bed with his wife, Shira. She picked up the phone.

"Avshi, your mother."

"Hello, Momma," he said, taking up the telephone

Her voice was thin and scared on the other end of the phone.

"Where were you when I called?"

"We were only in Eilat with the boys for a couple of days."

"You must come over. The Nazis, they are here again."

"But Momma," he said.

"Did I give you the last milk of my breast?" she asked.

He hung up the phone and turned to Shira, softly kissing her cheek.

"Sad dreams?" Shira asked.

"Another one of her fits," he said.

When he arrived at his mother's home, Avshalom found her standing in the door of her apartment brandishing a worn slipper in her hand.

"Hurry, Avshi, hurry!" she called as he got out of his car.

"How are you feeling, Momma?"

"The Nazis," she cried. "They were here."

He climbed the stairs slowly, his tiny mother waving her slipper to speed him up.

"You heard Mr. Herzog died," she said.

“No,” Avshalom said, taking his mother’s soft hand. She wore a brown cardigan sweater over her cotton nightgown. She squeezed his hand tightly.

“He died and stayed in his house for three days before someone found him.”

“He was a nice man,” Avshalom said.

“And look where that got him,” she said.

His mother’s usually immaculate apartment was a mess: plates were piled in the sink; papers lay everywhere, on the floor, the table, the sofa; the curtains were pulled closed; the room smelled stale; even his father’s study, a model of German order, was a testament to chaos—his large leather-bound books had been pulled from their shelves and strewn about; his ashtray that had lain full for the last eight years since his death had been turned over on his desk; his banker’s lamp lay smashed and broken.

She had always been neat in the German tradition. She once joked with Avshalom as a child that if he went out to play after dinner without brushing his teeth and *has v’chalila* he died in an attack, she promised to pry open his coffin with her stirring ladle to clean his teeth for the journey.

“What happened, Momma?” Avshalom said, surveying the damage.

She threw the slipper at him, missing his head by a few feet. “I told you, the Nazis came and took things.”

He pulled his mother closer to him and held her in his arms, an embrace so warm he hoped it would chase away every phantasm until Judgment Day. She, too, carried an odd smell about her, a smell of age and neglect that he had never noticed before. She pulled herself violently from his arms.

“I made a prayer for him.”

“Who?” Avshalom asked.

“Good-bye, Mr. Herzog. Good-bye.”

“Momma. What happened?”

“Like *Kristallnacht*,” she said. “They even took my mezuzah from the front doorpost.”

She began to cry, quiet at first, her lip trembling, then from the depths of her body she burst out weeping. "My beautiful mezuzah!" She swung her arms and struck out at her son. "I will never forget."

Why would somebody steal his mother's mezuzah? Avshalom wondered. He went to the door and could see the outline, slanting inward at the top of the doorpost, where the mezuzah had been for more than forty years. It had been pried off, that much he could tell. And it was a beautiful piece, crafted in Weimar Germany, a time when Jews enjoyed a brief renaissance before the yellow stars and cattle cars.

Two portions of the Torah from Deuteronomy inside the silver case, gone. "HEAR O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD. THE LORD IS ONE," he repeated to himself in Hebrew, running his fingers over the bare space on the door. "You shall write these words on the doorposts of your house." Why would someone steal an old woman's mezuzah? He remembered as a child being too short to reach it, kissing his fingertips and touching them to the doorpost beneath the shining silver. And later, when he had grown, he could finally see the intricate carving: flowers blooming at the top and the bottom, a jeweled crown, and tiny silver doors like a miniature ark, revealing on its parchment when opened the holy name *Shaddai*. What a mystical thrill he had felt, repeating that name as a youth, an all-powerful name that was older than any tree or building or person he knew.

"I know who took it," his mother said.

"Who?" Avshalom said, closing the door and leading his mother back into the living room.

"The man who plants the flowers and fixes the garden. He is a Nazi Arab. I have seen him. He took my mezuzah. The Nazi took it."

"Dudu took your mezuzah?"

"Yes. Yes. Dudu took it."

"Dudu is Jewish," Avshalom said. "Why would he take it?"

"No, no," she cried. "He is not Jewish. I have seen him riding his donkey and goose-stepping on the street. He is the one. He took it."

"Sit down, Momma."

"It hurts my bones to sit. I will stand."

"Sit down, Momma," he said, clearing a space on the couch.

She sat, and slid the sleeves of her brown cardigan up her arm, revealing the blue numbers burned into her skin.

“Momma, I am sure Dudu did not take your mezuzah.”

“Oh, you are sure,” she said. “The laborer from Mevaseret has all the answers now. Tell me, Rashi: Why is the grass blue? Why is the moon made of Limburger cheese?”

“Stop it, Momma.”

“You are lucky you were not at the camps. You would not have survived like your father and I. You are too believing. Poor Avshi, if the Nazis had told you to go to the showers, you would have run there smiling with a towel and shampoo in your hands.”

They sat in silence. Avshalom seethed. For a moment, he wanted to strike his mother, dash her broken to the floor, like a rag doll.

“Momma?”

“Son of mine,” she answered.

“What’s wrong?”

“And to think you were the smart one. I told you, the Nazis took my mezuzah.”

“Did you go to Mr. Herzog’s funeral?”

“Ahh!” she said. “Funerals. I have been to too many. After your father, I never went to another. What good is it?”

“To pay your respects.”

“To the dead? You don’t understand anything, do you? When your father died, I had to take everything from his life and carry it with me. Right here.” She tapped her right temple with her forefinger. “And when Moses Solomon died, and when Esti Hertz died, all of them. Now I have to remember for Mr. Herzog, too.”

“You miss Mr. Herzog.”

“Never!” she said. “He scraped at that violin all day like a cat scratching on a pole. Miss him? No. But we are one less now. You don’t understand. You live in Mevaseret with your family and you build things with your hands. You will forget me when I’m gone. Soon, there will be none of us left. Next door there are students living, and they play rock and roll music, bang, bang, bang, bang, all the time. What do they know of anything? I am tired, Avshi. My mezuzah is gone. Your father’s study is ruined.”

“Momma, go to sleep.”

“For what?”

“Let me tell you a story I remember from school.”

“A story about car engines and grease monkeys I do not want to hear.”

“There are two ships sailing on the seas.

“Ha! What do you know of that, you only know the Kinneret and the *Yam HaMelach*.”

“The ship that comes into the port is seen by the wise man as more of an object of joy than the ship about to leave the harbor.”

“Not if the ship is going into Cyprus,” she said. “I have been to Cyprus, you know...”

“Momma, listen, just because a ship is leaving the port does not mean you should be sad or afraid. Because, soon that ship will reach another harbor, a glorious harbor...”

“My smart boy,” she said. “My smart, smart boy. You are speaking Greek.” She let out a long loud yawn. “But you have found success. I will sleep now.”

Avshalom stood up and helped his mother to her feet. He took her arm and led her to the bedroom. She sat on the bed and removed her brown cardigan and handed it to her son, and she got into bed.

“Do you remember what I said to you as a child when I put you to bed?”

“You said, ‘goodnight.’”

“Oh, Avshi. Turn out the light. I will clean up the apartment tomorrow.”

He clicked off the light, leaned over, and planted a soft kiss on her forehead. He walked out of the room with her sweater over his arm.

“*Schlaf gut, mein Kind*,” she called after him sarcastically.

Alone in his mother’s living room, Avshalom began to tidy up, gathering loose papers in his arms. He still had his mother’s brown sweater draped over his left arm. He hung it over a chair and then noticed a weight, something in the pocket. He reached inside and found shining in his palm his mother’s Weimar mezuzah. She must

have taken it down to clean it, polished it to a fine shine, and then placed it in her pocket and forgotten it.

She had turned over pillows on the sofa, pulled chairs out from the living room table, emptied her china cabinet, breaking two plates. She had entered her husband's study, ransacked the bookshelves, torn papers from his drawers, then she had gone to the kitchen—and that is where Avshalom found the soup spoon, bent and twisted from the effort of prying, on the floor beneath the kitchen table. And in the bathroom, beside the sink among tubes and pills, he found a small jar of silver polish, her toothbrush lying on the floor, its bristles tarnished and black.

He held the mezuzah tight in his hand and thought of his wife and what she would say to him: "You want your impossible mother to live with us?"

Avshalom slowed his car at the edge of the city and pulled over at the top of a valley. He stepped out of his car and walked to the edge of a steep cliff. The abandoned village of Lifta lay below. Somewhere in the darkness, a solitary horse neighed. He pulled the mezuzah from his pocket, cradled it in his two hands, and shivered against a wind. He would never tell his mother about the mezuzah. He would let her think that her mind was a steel trap and would let her live with the mystery until she stepped off the planet to meet her husband. He would give the mezuzah to his twelve-year-old, David, and he would fasten it to his door when he had a home of his own.

Avshalom looked into the black sky splashed with yellow stars and the glowing horn of the moon.

"Of course we will not forget, Momma," he whispered to himself. "Look at the stars. There are six million of them. And the moon, it is so beautiful tonight."

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Searching for the Waste Land

Yaer Talkar

David had no idea how he had landed upon the river bed, but when he saw the bottle of toddy bobbing in the water, he sighed, rolled over and gazed at the forest. He liked where he was. It was his favourite spot; sometimes he even came here when sober. He liked to watch the grass swaying in the breeze and the afternoon sunlight glimmering over the water like a dancer courting her king.

David searched the horizon with no real plan or intent. For a moment his gaze lingered on a hefty peacock displaying rainbow feathers and trying to lure a nearby peahen, and then moved to a parrot perched on a Pipal tree. The parrot squawked loudly as if cheering, and David, amused, thought to imitate him, but suddenly, hearing female voices, he froze. He could hear Mira Bai, who was leading the group, and, knowing she'd recognize him, he crawled to where land met water, dug himself a small enclave and clung to the wet river bed.

"Laxmi, we must get you married before you lose your prize for free," Mira Bai declared, shaking her hips as she approached one of the young women. "Wah-Wah!" She pushed aside the woman's thin *dupatta* and nodded. "You could get a rich man in exchange for that body."

Laxmi pulled her *dupatta* back and covered herself, "Mira Bai!" The village pundit's wife cut in, "She's only seventeen."

"Bah. At seventeen, I had ridden plenty of horses." Mira Bai laughed, counting with her fingers. "The land owner from Bombay, the police chief, the priest, and of course let's not forget the travelling American." The group burst into laughter except for the seventeen-year-old.

"Is it true?" she asked so softly that David barely heard her.

From his hiding place, David watched the women step into the shallow water, their long hair falling loosely over their shoulders. They didn't strip, but their wet saris clung to each contour. Some were

skinny and others were voluptuous, but he couldn't take his eyes off Mira Bai. Dark and slightly plump, her near-naked vitality unnerved him.

Mira Bai spread her fingers wide like a cat extending its claws and snickered, "If I was a man, I'd pounce on you like a tiger on a newborn calf." Then, cupping her fingers and using them like a bucket, she splashed water over Laxmi's dry *Salvar Kamis*. Laxmi squealed and tried to escape her, but Mira Bai was quicker. She grabbed hold of Laxmi's arm and pushed her into the river. David expected Laxmi to cry out, but she laughed. When she rose up and tried to cover her wet nudity, Mira Bai raced forward and pushed Laxmi's hands away. "Hide them and they will lose their vigour. Then, when a man unveils his prize, let them loose and watch him behave like a baby hungry for milk." David tried to listen to Mira Bai, but memories of his wife kept intruding. He shut his eyes, but her voice only became stronger.

"Maya," he remembered asking his wife. "Why do you want to leave?"

"I cannot take this any longer," she replied. "I want to feel free. I want to breathe air, not human sweat. I want a new beginning."

David stared back. "Servants wash and iron our clothes. They clean the house and prepare our meals. A personal driver takes you wherever you want to go. What else can you want?"

"I want out," she cried, banging her fist on his grandfather's oak table. "The water is dirty, the crowds are overwhelming and the stench is unbearable."

"I don't believe you. What do you really want?"

"Let go, David," she begged. "Let's go to Israel for one year. I promise we will come back if you don't like it."

Water penetrated his nose and jerked him back to reality. He worried that someone might have heard him cough, but the women had already left. Using the rocks as leverage, he raised himself up and waded across the river. Sand stuck to his soggy trousers and he tried to brush it off, but it was glued on like burnt rice to a stainless steel

bowl. Then, he saw the pages floating in the pebbled water and a line flashed before his eyes:

Are you alive or not? Is there nothing in your head?

David stumbled but read further,

memory and desire, stirring

"Please," he cried out. "Not her Waste Land!" He picked the pages up gently and placed them on a rock to dry.

David had never been interested in poetry, and the only stories he read were those that appeared in the *Economic Times*. Then, two months after Maya left, their dog refused to eat and died. David remembered how Maya would meticulously shampoo Rover's starch-white Pomeranian hair and blow-dry the fluffy fur into a cuddly ball. Then, she would hold the dog, murmur how cute he was, and pester David until he agreed.

"I want him," Maya had pleaded. "He's so soft and fluffy."

"Who will take care of him?" David asked her. "Your sister is manipulating you again. Why did she leave us alone with the dog?"

"You never liked Joyce," Maya pouted. "You are always saying that her house is bleak and dirty. But she doesn't have servants like we do!"

"Maya," David cut in. "Her house has only two rooms. Why doesn't she open the windows? It smells like an old age home."

"I want him," Maya interrupted and caressed the puppy. "I promise to take care of him. And anyway, you owe my sister for..."

"Not again, Maya," David cringed. "It was not me who told Joshua."

"I told you; you must have told him. Who else knew that she had been with a man before?" She spoke in a tone so soft that it was menacing. "Why else would he have cancelled their wedding?"

Wanting to prevent a huge fight, David had agreed to take the dog, not knowing that one day he would have to cremate it. When he returned from the crematorium, his clothes smelt of burnt flesh. David sank into the black leather armchair and tried to sleep, but he couldn't forget the flames that had devoured the tiny body in one huge gulp.

“Here, Saab,” the servant cut into his thoughts. “Tea, just the way you like: a tinge of sugar, milk, and a generous covering of cream.”

David took a sip, set the cup down on the gold engraved ceramic saucer and let his gaze circle the polished room. The floor was spotless, and he could make out the outline of the hand-carved bookshelf his father had bought in Kashmir. Staring at the creases in the brown teak, he remembered how as a child he had chipped off its right edge with a cricket bat. He had expected to be scolded, but his father brought a soft cloth and tore it into two. After dabbing the smaller one in wax, he handed it to David and together they waxed the teak surface for hours. “Things break,” his father had said, “and will never shine as before.”

Out of the corner of his eye David glimpsed something pink poking out from under thick black ledgers. Curious but too tired to check, he called the servant. It was one of Maya's college notebooks. The moment he opened it and set his eyes on the page, her voice charged at him:

April is the cruellest month.

He did not know that the pages he had salvaged contained passages from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. He had never heard of Eliot. Thinking that the enigmatic passages might explain something about why she'd left, he read on:

breeding Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing memory and desire

“What does she mean?” David spoke aloud. “Why would a rebirth of Lilacs and roots be cruel? And what does she mean by memory and desire?” David scratched his head and took another sip. Licking the cream off his upper lip, he fondly remembered his mother regularly collecting the cream in a separate saucer for him.

“Oh,” David exclaimed. “Maybe she meant family ties; desire—a manifestation of these ties.” He lowered his head. “Maya, is this how you considered life with me—cruel?”

He flipped a page.

What branches grow out of this stony rubbish?

“Her geraniums!” David shouted out. Maya had tried to grow them on the balcony, but the roots never caught on. “Was I at fault that my grandfather built a house of stone? Was I to blame for the hot sun beating mercilessly on her budding plants?”

And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief

“Cricket,” David cried. “Is she blaming me for India losing to Pakistan? Am I Sunil Gavaskar or Kapil Dev? It is they who are playing cricket so horribly.” David flung the cup of tea aside. Grabbing the pages, he paced across the room. “Am I responsible for everything? *Unreal City*. What's unreal about Bombay?”

He felt the words tugging and tearing him apart, but he couldn't stop.

Later that day, when he accompanied Babu, his servant, to the local market, David was appalled at the mounds of rotting food lying around the wooden crates of fish and vegetables. A young boy with brown pupils sat on one of the broken crates staring aimlessly into the crowd while a huge black rat sniffed at the sores on his feet. David cringed.

“Babu,” he turned to the servant. “Is that boy dead?”

But Babu was arguing with a fisherwoman on the price of a pomfret and didn't hear. The boy reminded David of one of the passages Maya had written.

I had not thought death had undone so many

“This is the Unreal that Maya wrote about,” David blurted out. Pointing all around, he recalled another phrase from the notebook,

He who was living is now dead, We who were living are now dying

Babu rushed to David's side. "Saab, please calm down. Everyone is staring. Come—let's go home." He grabbed David's arm and coaxed him gently into a taxi, but David kept on, "This is Unreal. This is Unreal."

Back at home, David rested on his grandfather's armchair. "Maya didn't like it in Bombay because it is unreal. So I will give her the opposite—a serene village house." Babu made a face but said nothing.

Certain he had found the solution, David bought a bungalow in a remote village between Pune and Nasik and then, deed in hand, took a taxi to Maya's sister's house in Dadar. Over a starched white silk shirt, David was wearing a navy blue Bombay Dyeing suit, and his shoes shone as if for a military parade.

"Hello, Joyce," he said to the middle-aged woman who opened the door. She was wearing torn slippers, and her housedress was stained with cooking. "Can I come in?" He did not wait for an answer and walked into the tiny hall, but before he could sit, she grabbed his shoulder.

"Maya sent me divorce papers. Sign them."

He froze.

Enjoying the effect of her words, she continued, "She met a better man and they are living together." She went on to tell him the juicy details, but it was like trying to shoot a plane with a revolver after it has exploded into flames.

"Are you listening?" she demanded, worried that he had missed her message. He stood quiet for a few seconds and then whispered in Sanskrit:

Datta, dayadhvam, damyata.

She laughed like a hungry crow and held out the papers, but he brushed them aside and repeated the same three words but in English, "Give. Sympathize. Control."

He turned and descended the wooden stairs, taking off his new jacket and abandoning it on one of the steps. "Give," he mumbled as he undid his tie. He went on to unbutton his shirt, untied his shoelaces and discarded his shiny leather shoes. Then he walked towards the

railway station wearing only a white banyan and silk trousers. Out of a force of habit, he bought a first-class ticket, but he sat in the third-class compartment. “Sympathize,” he said to himself.

He struggled with the last word—*Damyata*—and repeated it again and again, thinking the answer had to be only a stretch away, but he found nothing.

Life in the village did not supply any new revelations, and David took to roaming the countryside carrying Maya’s hand-written text in a brown gunny sack.

But now, he had lost the pages, and as the light of day faded, he grew anxious. Running upstream and then downstream, he scoured the riverbed and found all except the one where Maya had underlined part of the sentence:

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne glowed on the marble

Next to *like a burnished throne*, Maya had written, *like a properly furnished home!*

David had grown attached to this sole deviation from poetic form, and when he realized he would never see it again he slumped to the ground. Clutching the moist soil, he squeezed his fingers together until his nails drew blood and tinted the river. Staring at the crimson water, David remembered Mira Bai’s red sari.

He sat up excitedly. Perhaps Mira Bai had seen the page. With a new surge of hope he picked up the gunny bag and ran towards the village. Streaks of light flickered from windows of one-storey stone houses, with thatched roofs. He turned into the narrow pathway leading to Mira Bai’s house and knocked on the wooden door.

“Mira Bai,” he shouted, but no one answered. The hour was late and he peeked in cautiously. “Mira Bai, are you there?”

A door banged and he heard running feet. Alarmed, he turned in the direction of the noise. The back door was ajar and he moved towards it, but just as he was about to peek in a hand clasped his wrist.

“Davi Baba, what are you doing here? It is not nice to barge into a woman's house at night.”

David smiled. He liked how she cut his name short, but more than that he liked the intimacy it suggested. He began apologizing but held his tongue when he saw the wide grin on Mira Bai's face.

"You look funny," she continued, "...like an abandoned camel finding a green oasis in the middle of the Rajasthan desert."

"I am not a camel!"

"I don't mean a real one, Davi Baba," she replied in exasperation. "Come. I'll prepare some good Hindustani chai for you."

David shook his head. "Did you find a piece of pink paper with writing on it while you were bathing..." She laughed and caught his hand in her own. At first he was confused but then, realizing what he had said, he stuttered. "I heard that you... sometimes in the river... because it's shallow."

Mira Bai pressed her soft palm against his lips. "You speak too much," she whispered. He felt the warmth of her fingers and shuddered. In a weak whisper he told her to stop before he lost control, but instead, she stepped closer.

There was something animal-like, almost primordial in her; her naked feet on top of his, her silk sari against his legs, her breath against his face. He moaned, grabbed her and pulled her closer. She giggled and caressed his back. Then, winding her hand up his shoulder, she removed the gunny bag and tossed it away.

In Search of a Good Woman

Galina Vromen

I know the kind of guys who hang out at Holy Holly's Bar and Grill, flipping the buttons of the pinball machine like their lives depend on making those metal balls skedaddle. This guy who later introduced himself to me as Jim didn't look like any of them. Holly obviously didn't know him either 'cause she knows what everyone drinks, but when it came to him, she had to ask.

"What will it be, Mister?"

"A beer. Make it Carlsberg."

"Sorry, we don't carry that," she said, cocking her head and checking him out and trying to figure out how he had ended up in her joint. I mean Holy Holly's is grunge city. Which is what I like about it. It's so messed up already you don't gotta worry about messing it up. It's not often a guy in a clean suede coat comes into her joint, with a silk tie showing out from underneath no less.

"Whatever you have on tap will be fine," he said. Then he turned to me. "Can I get you one?" he asked, a little too friendly-like to be really friendly, if you get my drift.

"Thanks, I'm just fine." I pointed to the mug I was nursing.

He had on a set of these round tortoise-rimmed glasses that made him look innocent, or dopey, or intellectual; I couldn't make up my mind which. And his hair was cut fancy, kind of like Robert Redford's, but dark brown. Anyway, he didn't fit in at Holy Holly's. I'm not even sure I fit in the place, seeing as I have a job and all, which is something most of the guys who come drinking there don't even dream of any more. Mostly, I hang out there 'cause it's the closest bar to King's Taxi dispatch station, so it's convenient when I get off from driving my shift and want to relax before hitting the sack.

"You know, I think we've met before," he said to me.

"Really? I can't say as I remember, if you'll excuse me for saying so," I answered.

“No, no, I distinctly remember you,” he said. To get more of me in his sights, he moved his barstool back a few inches, which was probably necessary, seeing as there is about 224 and a half pounds of me to take in. I shifted on my stool, feeling uncomfortable with about 99 percent of myself as he stared at me. The other one percent—my brain—was working in overdrive, trying to figure out why this guy would remember me. People usually don’t.

I mean, I’m big, but I’m not really noticeable. Usually it’s me remembers people’s faces and pays attention to what they’re up to. You kinda gotta when you’re in my line of business. Otherwise, you can get into some bad spots.

“By the way, my name’s Jim Moyer,” he said, thrusting out his hand to introduce himself. The gesture was so abrupt I was startled and managed only a limp shake back.

“Billy Foster,” I said.

“Billy Foster,” he repeated slowly, looking up toward the ceiling as if he was going through some Rolodex in his mind, trying to figure out where he had my number. “What do you do with yourself, Mr. Billy Foster?” he said, smiling and eyeing me up and down again. I wondered if he was an insurance man trying to drum up some business, though it was kinda late at night for that and you’d have to be a fool of a salesman to think someone around Holly’s would have any dough for premiums.

“Drive a cab,” I answered. “And you?”

“Drive a cab, drive a cab,” he said, ignoring the question and mulling over my answer the same way he had my name, that Rolodex still flipping away. “Aha. Okay. Got you,” he said, poking his index finger at me. The signet ring on his finger flickered as it caught the light of the yellow lamp over the bar. He beamed me a smile. “You drove my wife about a month ago. Picked her up at our house in the evening.”

“You don’t say,” I answered, more than a bit surprised because no one ever remembers a cabby. But I never forget an address. Some silly kind of professional pride I have. “Where you live?” I asked him.

“Over by Cliffside,” he answered.

“What’s the address?”

“25 Birch Lane.”

“Mmm,” I said, non-committal like. It took me less than a millisecond to remember. I’d had such a hard time finding Birch Lane I wasn’t likely to forget it. But I was in no rush to let him know that. So I just sat there, going, “mmm,” and “ooooh” and making other noises that don’t mean much but let-me-think-about-this while it all comes back to me.

We don’t get many calls from Cliffside. At least not from people his age, which was about 40 I’d guess. Most people that side of town got their own cars, usually fancy ones. No need for taxis, except for the occasional geezer or “geezerette” (I like calling them that) too old to be driving any longer, and most of those old folks only go out during the day, to doctors and such.

Anyway, I remember it being odd to be called out to Cliffside at what must have been about nine-thirty at night. The house was a brown ranch with white lace curtains, the kind that make you think of petticoats or wedding dresses. The lawn had carefully lit-up elves all over it. Talk about ditzy.

I remembered the wife too. A wispy lady, with dirty-blonde hair tied back in a ponytail, except most of the hair had come loose and fell into her eyes. She was wearing jeans and an olive-green sweater so big it made her look small.

“It sure took you long enough,” were her first words to me. She seemed agitated but not the kind of looking-at-their-watch agitated people get when they think they’re going to be late for something.

“Sorry about that,” I said. “It took me a while to find you.”

She didn’t listen to my answer, having turned her attention to the two kids with her. Both looked sleepy. The smaller boy, he must have been about four, held the hand of the bigger boy—he was about nine and hung on to his mother’s hand. She pushed them gently into the back seat, murmuring to them comfortingly, then settled herself by the window.

She looked like my high-school sweetheart, Mary. The one who refused to marry me. Or I should say, the first girl who refused to marry me on account of my being what she called “wishy-washy,” whatever that means. Nearly killed me, her saying that, especially

since she'd been so crazy about me at first. Every time I can't make up my mind which damn brand of soap to buy, I think of Mary calling me wishy-washy. Every time I think about having gotten conned into driving a cab, by my Dad, whose cab I drive instead of having studied to be an electrician like I wanted to back then, I think of Mary. Actually, I haven't found a woman yet who'll have me, on a permanent basis I mean. But that's another story, nothing to do with 25 Birch Lane in Cliffside.

"Where to, Ma'am?" I asked.

"Drive towards Willow Boulevard. I'll direct you from there," she said.

By the time we got to Willow Boulevard, the boys were asleep, their pink faces edible as marzipan, and she seemed lost in thought.

"Where to now, Ma'am?"

"Oh," she looked at me, as if noticing me for the first time. "Just a minute." She ruffled through her handbag until she found a slip of paper. "Okay, the corner of Front Street and Market Avenue."

I hate people who do that, don't give you the address, just feed you information bit by bit, so you can't figure out the best way to get someplace. She wasn't the chatty type, at least not that night. We didn't say a word more until I hit the intersection she wanted.

"Okay, now what?"

"Now nothing. We'll get out here."

"On the corner?"

"Yeah, that will be fine."

"You sure?" I asked.

"Yep."

"Well, it's up to you."

"Yes, you certainly could say that," she said, kind of ironic-like.

She pulled a tenner out of her bag. "Keep the change," she said. "It'll take me a minute to get the kids out."

"Sure," I answered. "Take your time." The corner looked pretty deserted to me. It's on the edge of the city's industrial zone, though there are some residential buildings there, mostly seedy ones, a bit down the road.

I'm the kind of guy who likes speculating about the passengers I drive around. I wouldn't have expected her to head for a dumpy part of town like this, especially at night. She looked like she'd been born on the top rung of life, kind of classy, like Meryl Streep. Reserve was her middle name. Seemed to me, she didn't have a clue where she was going. Or where she was at, really, from the way she kept looking around as she tried to pull out her kids, unwieldy as warm taffy, from the car.

This time she held the little one in her arms. His head rested on her shoulders, his chubby legs dangling like a marionette's above her knees. The older boy clutched her hand. She stood on the corner looking as dazed as her children, until I drove away. In my rear view mirror, I finally saw her turn into Market Avenue.

I hadn't thought about that ride again until this Mr. Jim Moyer—if that really was his name—mentioned it at the bar. So suddenly, I'm wondering if maybe he's lying. Maybe she's not his wife. Maybe he's a police detective. Because, I'm sure as hell that I never saw any man—boyfriend or husband—that night. And I'm even surer than hell that no one would remember me, sitting in my cab. I hadn't even gotten out to open the door for her. So I'm still saying "Mmm" and scratching my head, looking as dumb as I can, trying to figure out why this guy is pretending he's seen me before.

"I bet you remember. My wife's a pretty little lady. People don't usually forget her," said Jim.

I pulled my Lucky Strikes out of my pocket, offered Jim one, which he refused. I lit up slowly, inhaling deeply and blowing out a long train of smoke up into the already smoke-filled air, playing for time to figure out what to say. You never know when remembering a ride has something in it for you. By now I'd figured Jim had come into Holy Holly's to track me down about this particular ride. There was nothing coincidental about it. The police department must be doing pretty well these days to dress up their detectives so fancy. But why bother with a cover story? Last time the police were looking for someone and thought I could help, they were up front about what they wanted. Plus they got me off the hook on a traffic violation that was spoiling my

perfect record—to show their “good will,” as they put it. I hadn’t been ticketed for anything since then but I figure it’s never a bad idea to help out a cop.

Maybe there’d even be some money in it, which I could damn well use, what with my father racking up bills like there’s no tomorrow in that nursing home I put him in since he started wetting his pants like a baby six months ago.

I wondered what the woman was wanted for. And what about those two kids?

“I might remember,” I said.

“Where’d you leave her off?” he asked. I could tell he was trying hard to be casual, but he wasn’t doing a good job.

“What’s it to you?” I answered.

He looked at me grudgingly, as if my question had let him down somehow.

“I’d appreciate it if you’d tell me,” he said, a little huffily, I thought.

“Well now, I don’t know,” I said. I still didn’t have his game figured. “I’d appreciate it if you tell me *why* you’d appreciate it so much if I told you,” I answered. I was kind of pleased with myself for giving him a bit of lip. I’m usually slow on the comeback, especially with haughty types like him.

“I need to find her,” he said, a worried edge creeping into his voice.

“Your wife?” I said, surprised. Seemed a bit weird to me that he’d be looking for her where I’d left her off a month ago.

“Yeah, well, I’ve been trying to talk to her.”

It took me a moment to catch his drift. When I did, I cocked my head and saw him in a different light. This was a man in pain. “You mean, you haven’t seen her since I drove her away?”

“That’s the long and the short of it,” he answered, kind of relieved I’d figured it out. “I’ve been trying to talk to her, but they won’t let me.”

“They?”

“The people where she’s staying.”

My mind is saying, “a cult.” My mind is saying, “Mafia.” My mind is saying, “a boyfriend” or “his in-laws.” My mind is saying, “I don’t know what is going on, but take it easy, don’t rush. For once in your goddamn life, be a bit cagey. Be a bit smart.”

He's looking at me close now. He's gone from puffed up to pathetic, like a balloon that's suddenly lost all its air.

"So, they won't let you talk to her," I repeated his words.

"Yeah, can you believe it?" he said, shaking his head like he couldn't figure out whether to be sad or angry.

"Why won't they let you talk to her?" I said, like I knew who "they" were.

"They say she doesn't want to talk to me," he answered.

"Imagine that," I said, neutral-like.

"Listen," he said, suddenly furtive. "Maybe this will help your memory." He laid out five one-hundred-dollar bills on the table.

"That's a pretty sum of money, you got there," I said, leaning back like he was showing me some unusual bills he happened to collect as a hobby. "It might actually help my memory some, but I don't know," I said, real slow, casually, like I've seen guys do in the movies when they up the stakes.

"I'll bet this will be a good jolt to the mind," he said, adding another bill, and another and yet another, until he had stacked up five more bills of one hundred dollars each. "Mind you, though, that's all I have."

"Well, I can see you genuinely want to find that wife of yours," I said, eyeing the money, which looked damn good to me. I imagined being able to wipe off some of that debt on my credit card. I thought about taking Dad out for a meal in a nice restaurant. Maybe surprising Mary by sending her a bouquet of roses with a note saying, "Just for old time's sake," signed, "Wishy-washy." Funny how stuff like that pops into your head at the most unexpected times. I hadn't talked to Mary in 15 years. Hell, she was probably married to some beer-guzzling guy with a potbelly who growled at her during the commercials in football games while she paced around the house, picking up his dirty socks. She probably had five kids, or at least three. She'd always liked kids. I wondered if she still painted. She'd been good at that; did a great painting of me once. Real talent, she had. Anyway, thinking of Mary was not going to get that one grand from the counter into my hot little hand.

I picked up the cash, slowly, like I was counting it or something.

“Why do they say she doesn’t want to talk to you?” I said, fully sympathetic with a man who seemed ready to part with \$1,000 to save his wife from whatever evil has befallen her. Hell, he’d probably already laid out a couple hundred just to get my name from the dispatcher.

“Those bitches say she told them I hit her,” he said.

“What bitches?” I asked.

“In that goddamn women’s shelter she’s hiding out at,” he said. “Damn bitches,” he muttered.

Suddenly, everything fell in place. Her not giving me an address. The woman had her husband’s number. She knew he’d try to find her. To find me. To get me to help him find her. She must have been a lot more scared than she’d let on. Reserved, I had thought at the time. Scared shitless, more like it. She didn’t even take a suitcase. Just walked out with the clothes on her back. And the two kids, of course. He must have been convinced she’d come back. He hadn’t even run after her. Well, she hadn’t come back. Good for her.

I figured out a long time ago that no one ever knows anything about anyone. But I hadn’t for a moment thought this Robert Redford wimp-imitation might be a wife-beater. Which just proves my theory about never knowing.

The only thing I knew right then was that I didn’t want his \$1,000. Besides, I really didn’t know where the lady had gone. Smart little woman. As deliberately as I had picked up the money, I set it back down again.

“Sorry, mister. I can’t help you,” I said, looking him right in the face. “All I remember is I left her off at some street corner, can’t remember where. Seems like she didn’t want even me to know where she was going, in case you ever found me. Which you did,” I said. “Guess the little wife really wanted to make sure you couldn’t get at her.” I pulled out my wallet to pay for my drink. I slapped a fiver on the table.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Jim Moyer. Those bitches just may be right about her not wanting to talk to you. Good night now.”

I walked off before he recovered from his surprise at my change of heart. I don’t know if he tried to follow me as I pulled away from Holy

Holly's. All I know is that as I cruised toward home, I felt good. A grand is a lot of money, perhaps not enough to change my life, but still a lot. Walking away from it was the best thing I'd done in a long time. It's funny what something like that does to your mind—like thinking of Mary. Maybe she'd kept up the painting, made something of herself, who knows. Maybe she wasn't married to Mr. Beer Belly, after all. She might still be single, or divorced. "Well, Mary, maybe I'm not so wishy-washy after all," I found myself telling her in my mind.

And that isn't all I'm going to tell her—as soon as I track her down.

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Crêpe-Café de Paris

Karen Marron

Solomon, the man who runs the Crêpe-Café de Paris at the Poughkeepsie Galleria, has never been to Paris. He may go there someday, he says, but just now he is content to stay where he is. “Then why choose crêpes?” I sometimes ask, on days when business is slow and there is nothing else for us to talk about. “Why *de Paris*?” I pronounce the word as Solomon does, *Pareez*. At this, Solomon takes a long drag on his cigarette—though smoking has been prohibited at the Galleria for as long as I can remember—and replies, “I wanted this place to be different.”

In this, at least, Solomon has succeeded: there is nothing else like the Crêpe-Café in the Galleria food court. I can’t quite put my finger on the reason why. In no way does it resemble a Parisian café, despite the salt and pepper shakers in the shape of the Eiffel Tower. I mentioned this to Solomon once, but he dismissed my comment with a wave of his hand. “Did you ever go to Israel?” he asked. “I will tell you what it is like here—it is like the Dead Sea. But *Dead Sea*—this is no name for a café.”

“How is this place like the Dead Sea?” I visited there once, when I was a child. I wanted to tell Solomon this, to show him that I would understand.

“Chayim!” Solomon called to the only customer in the café, the Israeli boy who worked at the kiosk across from the food court. “Kate wants to know why we are like the Dead Sea. You are the expert, you tell her.”

Chayim laughed aloud, spraying flecks of mushroom and cheese crêpe onto the aluminum table. “I tell you why,” he said. “Your food is too fucking salty!”

Chayim is “the expert” on the Dead Sea because he has been selling its products for over six months. For eleven hours a day, he lurks near his kiosk and pounces on passersby, smothering their hands in Dead

Sea salts before they can refuse. Chayim wears gauzy Indian shirts that expose the dark hairs and the gold Star of David on his chest. Before arriving at the Poughkeepsie Galleria, he worked in a mall in Durham, North Carolina, and before that in Laramie, Wyoming. “And before that, Gaza,” he says smugly when he tells his story, which pretty much happens each time a girl enters the café. In the Israeli army he fought in a combat unit, he tells her in a grave tone. It was very, very dangerous. He is lucky to be alive.

Occasionally, a girl is sufficiently impressed to give Chayim her number. He then spends his following few lunch breaks calling her from his cell phone. The girls never answer, but Chayim always leaves a message: “It is Chayim, the soldier. Call me.”

I glance at Solomon and roll my eyes. He looks down, flipping crêpes vigorously, refusing, perhaps, to conspire against a fellow Israeli. His hands and arms are streaked with pink scars. I can’t stop staring at them as he works.

I have been the only waitress at the café for nearly a year. Occasionally, when things get busy, Solomon tries to hire additional help, usually girls just out of high school or college students looking to make some extra cash. But they always leave within a month or two. The work is too hard, they claim, they are on their feet all day, and the pay is ridiculous. They deserve better. Though they might have stayed longer, they confide to me, if Solomon were less surly and unfriendly. I nod, I know where they are coming from. Sometimes entire days go by in which he doesn’t say a single word.

But I am not yet ready to leave this place. It is as if I could continue to arrange and rearrange packets of sugar and Sweet’N Low on tables forever, placing the salt shakers in their correct positions. I could continue serving customers their crêpes à l’oignon, and continue to smile, actually caring for a moment whether or not they enjoy them. Because Solomon and I share some kind of understanding. I’m just not entirely certain I know what it is.

Of course, this could all be in my head. I know virtually nothing about him, not even his last name. He’s always managed to avoid even my most direct questions. Likewise, he asks me nothing about myself. I

would like to believe there is a reason for this, but it's more probable that he just doesn't care.

Nevertheless, when customers come in, I chat with them loudly, so that Solomon might overhear. People often tell me I look familiar. It is possible, I reply, I have lived in Poughkeepsie my entire life. I went to Vassar College. I majored in English.

"And after college you had trouble finding a job..." they say sympathetically.

"No," I reply. "It was easy. I applied here and got hired the next day."

The customers nod with baffled looks on their faces.

"I'm so sorry," a woman rising from her table says to Chayim as he slams into her. He waves her away and collapses onto a chair.

"So fucking polite," he mutters after she's gone. "*Always please, thank you, I'm sorry.* In Israel we say what we feel. We tell the truth." He lights a cigarette, ignoring the disapproving looks of the other customers.

I barely look up. I have heard this speech many times before.

"And so shallow," he turns to me and grins, perhaps expecting a pat on the head for knowing the word. His front tooth is chipped and protruding in a way that infuriates me. Despite myself, I respond.

"If America is so bad, what are you doing here?" I ask.

"Money," Chayim replies simply. "Americans are stupid, they will buy anything. Your life are empty so you fill them with things. And food. That is why you are all so fat." He puffs out his own ample stomach so that the button of his jeans digs into his furry navel.

"You're so full of shit," I sigh.

Chayim sucks on his cigarette and says something to Solomon in Hebrew. Solomon laughs. I try to listen in on their conversation, but my few years of Hebrew school are not enough to let me understand.

A girl is sitting alone at a table; at the moment she's the only customer in the café. I've seen her type a thousand times before. Frail, oblivious. She picks absently at a Crêpe Suzette.

Solomon is watching her. He reaches for the bottle of Grand Marnier and raises it to his lips, then wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, not taking his eyes off her for a moment. I notice the soft part of his arm is white and free of scars.

The girl's long, pale fingers fiddle with the salt shaker. She turns it upside down, watching in fascination as a stream of salt pours from the tip of the Eiffel Tower onto the table. She draws little designs in the white mound that is left behind. I'll have to clean it up. I am suddenly filled with hatred for her.

Chayim comes in. He notices the girl, too, but this is not unusual. He walks over to where she is sitting and begins to talk to her. She engages him, but I can see she's just being polite.

"You want to give me your number?" he finally asks her.

"No, thank you," she says.

"Then I give you my number," he insists and writes it on a napkin, signing his name with a flourish.

She takes the napkin and smiles at Chayim. She rises from her chair and walks away, leaving her half-eaten crêpe and the pile of salt on the table behind her. I don't have to check to know that she hasn't left a tip.

"She's never going to call you, you know," I say to Chayim. "I don't know why you even bother."

"You are probably right," he shrugs, "but still, she might."

I shake my head.

"Anyway, it is not important," he says, "I am leaving soon. Going home."

"Why?" I'm surprised by how much this news affects me.

"The money is shit now," he replies. "It's too cold. And besides, the girls here," he gestures at the table where the girl had been sitting, "they are very nice, but they are not serious."

Solomon laughs, he has been listening. He calls out something in Hebrew.

"What did he say?" I snap, as if Solomon can't hear me.

Chayim grins. "He says she is beautiful, but her tits are too small."

When he leaves, I will be alone here. I feel I must grab at something, take something before it is too late. I sit next to Chayim and whisper, so Solomon will not hear me.

“So I have a question,” I say “What’s the deal with Solomon?”

“The deal?” he doesn’t understand.

“Where did he get all those scars on his hands? Was he injured in the army?” The question is inappropriate, but with Chayim it doesn’t really matter.

Chayim shakes his head. “The army? Solomon was never in the army.”

“Why not? I thought everyone went to the army in Israel.”

“He told them he was crazy. He said he would try to kill himself if they made him go.”

We both look over at Solomon, who is pouring out batter for a crêpe and singing softly with the radio.

“He’s not really crazy,” Chayim continues, “just afraid.”

“Weren’t you afraid to go to the army?” I ask.

Chayim nods and takes a drag on his cigarette. After a long pause he says, “In Israel it is very hard. Here in America, it is easy.” I wait for him to say more, but he doesn’t. I wonder if he would have, had his English been a little better.

“You should come to Israel one day,” he says, finally. “Come to see the real Dead Sea. It is beautiful.” He takes a napkin and writes his number on it, and hands it to me. Then he gets up and goes back to work.

“I was there one time, you know,” I say, feeling my voice echoing, whining. Solomon is not listening. I want to shake him. *Listen*, I want to scream. “I was there, in Israel. At the Dead Sea. I was ten years old. I went with my grandmother.” Solomon continues to stare at the oil sizzling on the hot plate.

“She’s dead now, she died of cancer.”

“That sucks,” he says.

It was a stupid thing to say. Grandmothers die all the time. Something else happened to him, probably, something much worse.

“The water is very salty,” my grandmother had told me, “So salty nothing can live in it. But you can’t drown in it, either — everything floats. Go in, it will sting like hell, but you can’t come to the Dead Sea and not go in the water.”

I ran into the sea, expecting to bounce on top of it like an inner tube. I was not prepared for the shock of the water. It was warm, like urine. It burned, attacking scratches I didn’t even know I had. I cried out, but stayed there. I had never felt anything like it.

My grandmother, who was still standing on the beach, called to me and pointed at a woman floating on her back. “Look at that,” she laughed. Directly in front of the woman, two pale beach balls were bobbing up and down, almost completely above water. It took me a minute to realize that they were her breasts. “That’s how you can tell they’re fakes,” my grandmother shouted.

My grandmother had no breasts at all. She’d had them removed years earlier when she’d been diagnosed with breast cancer. She did not go in the water, because she was embarrassed to be seen in a bathing suit.

When I finally got out of the sea, my skin was oily and smooth. Once I rinsed the salt off of my legs, I could no longer remember where the scratches had been.

At the end of the day, as I’m getting ready to go home, Solomon calls out to me. “Wait,” he says, “I have a question.”

“What is it?” Despite everything, I’m eager to respond

“Do you think you are going to stay for a while?”

“I’m going home now.”

“No, I mean, do you think you will keep working here.”

I nod. “Probably.”

“Why? Don’t you want to travel or something? See the world? Go to Paris maybe?”

“I like it here.” I shrug.

Solomon doesn’t look up, but I can tell he is smiling. “Of course you do,” he says. “It’s a wonderful place.”

He holds out his hand, and I am momentarily confused. I take it clumsily. His palm is sweaty, but his grip is surprisingly powerful. “I will see you tomorrow,” he says.

“Yes,” I reply, though it wasn’t a question.

As I leave the café, I pass the kiosk where Chayim is still working. He has latched onto an elderly woman, and is vigorously rubbing her fleshy palms with lotion. “It will make them very smooth,” he is saying, “just like a baby.” She looks at him strangely, as if unused to being touched, but leaves her hands in his.

Crêpe-Café de Paris was first published in *Small Spiral Notebook*.

Security Line

H. William Taesch

Ted stood at the double sink doing the dishes after Shabbat. When he flipped on the disposal, there was a little click, then nothing. He flipped the switch back down, rolled up his sleeve and reached into the sink filled with greasy water that sloshed over into the dairy sink. Jamming his hand through the small opening, with his index and middle finger, he scissored a stuck chicken bone.

Sari moved in behind him. "It's just the switch," she said and reached to turn it on.

"NO!" he yelled.

She slammed her hand on the counter and stalked out of the kitchen. He pulled out the bone. When he flipped the switch, there was a gratifying grinding racket that macerated all the recent garbage in his marriage.

They'd been fighting for days. Why, when he was angry with Sari, was she always angry with him? In the morning she would be leaving for a business trip for three weeks, the longest they had been apart since their wedding a year earlier. The respite would ease the pain of their arguments, but he would hate his inability to work through the problems, to make it right, the way he had when he flew to Israel after her accident, before their marriage.

Ted could not remember what had initiated the current argument. There was the issue of how her job was taking over their lives; how his life was "love-forty" since his move to Israel. How could he maintain his tennis coaching in the short winter days of the strange land of Israel, where indoor tennis courts were rare? All his clients were in America, where he had led the life of a self-employed, work-when-you-want tennis pro at an Orange County resort. There he had met Sari, who had spent a week recovering from her marriage to a Type A neurosurgeon who was wound so tight that she had felt like a slacker working her 2,000 billable hours per year. She would keep Ted serving to her backhand until the dusk made the ball invisible. Then she'd leave the court with a grim, "Tomorrow at 5:30." But he softened Sari.

He was an intuitive teacher, she said. He knew how to help people, he knew what they needed.

Before the accident, before their marriage, they spent a couple of years as casual lovers, sharing vacations together, not needing more. She would meet him after her business trips, so they could tack on a week together in Prague, London, Milan... After his years on tour, he had come to hate flying, though miraculously Sari said she didn't mind waiting in endless lines, threading her way through airports. After hours and hours of sitting cramped on a plane, Sari would walk through the Arrivals gate and would jump, fresh and smiling, into his arms, making the travel to meet her well worth it.

A couple of years later, Sari had married him on condition that they would live in Israel, at least until she could find some way to move to the States. In the meantime, her career in corporate risk management had taken off, and now she was on her way to the U.S. to help finalize the merger of an Israeli company with a Silicon Valley dot-com. The merged company would create 3-D instructions to guide the insertion of dental implants. She was a fifth-year associate with Lifshitz, Clyman, and Peters and, as she told Ted, "so close to partnership, so close." They were both in their late forties, no children. The plan had been to cash in after a few years and see the world.

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Ted stopped in front of the Departures terminal and got out of the car. A security officer tried to wave him on for pulling up in a red zone. Ted ignored him. He yanked Sari's bag from the trunk, gave her a perfunctory kiss on the cheek and said, surprising himself, that he would park and be back to wait with her, although she told him that she was fine with the prospect of booting up the *Wall Street Journal* on her laptop, with a cup of coffee at her side. But he wanted, needed, to part with some sort of amity.

The security line was long, a maze stretching almost a quarter of a mile as it wound away from the luggage scanners. He jostled some waiting Israelis and slid into the line beside Sari, who looked straight ahead, until she responded to a faint buzz from her Blackberry. He

watched her push her bag step by step, nod to her fellow travelers, and check her calls, messages, and emails, seemingly and annoyingly content.

“Look,” she said, pocketing the Blackberry packed with all of her other life. “I’m sorry it’s been so tense lately, but you’ve been acting like a shit.”

Not the best opener, but at least she was talking to him.

“I know you’re upset by my dragging you away from your happy life without me in *goy gan eden*. I know that your livelihood has been sacrificed on my behalf. I know you gave up your friends to come to Israel. I know you thought we would see the world. I know you thought I had more money than I do. I know you flew here to take care of me after the accident and I’m an ungrateful bitch. I know you thought we would be spending more time together. I know, I know, I know. Did I miss anything?”

Yeah, she did, actually. Sex. Sari had talked *sotto voce* so the others in the line couldn’t hear, but she had underestimated the interest of a fellow sufferer. An older woman, a *frummie*, no skin showing—she might as well have worn a burkha—turned and gave Ted a look of sympathy. He smiled back at her. He couldn’t help it, his innate California response.

“So what do you want to do about it?” he said. The labyrinth leading up to the scanners seemed endless. He had thought he could drop into the line for a few minutes, make a joke or two and get Sari laughing with him before she got on the plane.

“Maybe you missed the obvious, that it just isn’t working for us,” Sari said. “We’re both unhappy. There’s no joy, no fun, no supporting each other.”

She stood not looking at him, her arms folded across her DKNY business suit. She was right. It was worse than he had thought.

“There’s nothing to do,” Sari continued. “Just lead our lives and wait it out. What do *you* want to do? You blame me for anger, for yelling, always blaming you.”

Ted turned, and hissed into her ear, “Well, I don’t want to be angry all the time.”

Some of the women in the line, now facing them as the line turned 180 degrees on itself, gave them a long and detailed Israeli look of appraisal that expressed appreciation that something of interest might liven up their wait.

But Sari, the *Sabra*, continued unabated. “My mother was right about you, Ted. No real job, no real family, no religion. Gave tennis lessons whenever you felt like it. Nothing ties you to the ground.”

Her mother was furious when she heard Sari was dating Ted. Sari’s Israeli mother, now eighty-five and confined to a nursing home in Herzliya, would now only talk with her daughter when her Alzheimer’s kicked in and she was unable to identify her. When they visited on her better days, her mother preferred canasta with her fellow *Sabras*, even though Sari had shouted into her mother’s hearing aid, “He CONVERTED, Ima.” New to the tribe, Ted regretted many times over that he had bought Sari’s engagement ring at Harry Winston’s in Beverly Hills. Sari’s mother always shouted back, “HE BUYS RETAIL AND IS A JEW?”

“I converted for you, not your mother, babe. Taught you a pretty good backhand, too.” He didn’t mention the accident.

The people standing nearest to them picked up their bags and moved forward a notch, like cans in a Coke dispenser. They set down their bags and turned to hear Sari’s response.

“You told the *Bet Din* that you *didn’t* do it for me.”

“I did it for you and for me.” Ted stretched his arms and rolled his neck the way he did between sets in a tight game. His wife was a woman and a lawyer and a member of the Chosen People, an impossible combination to beat in an argument. Sari tied him in knots. He remembered that for Jews, it was what you did, not what you thought, that counted. Deed not creed. But when you said something, was that doing or thinking?

“Orthodox?” a woman in line ahead of them asked conversationally. Ted wore a yarmulke, but many visiting American Jews did so only in Israel. They both ignored the woman who nonetheless retained a pleasant questioning look on her face, as if watching *Desperate Housewives*, some light entertainment to pass the time.

“And I moved to Israel with you.” He was careful not to say, “for you.”

“You did. That’s huge. But of your own free will. I didn’t make you.” Sari nudged her carry-on bag forward another few inches with the toe of her suede boot.

Three years ago, Sari wore a steel halo for months after her Honda Civic rammed a fishtailing semi on a rainy December night outside Jerusalem. Months in an itchy, smelly vest supporting four steel rods screwed to a steel band attached to her skull. If the jagged vertebral fracture in her neck had been a bit worse, she would have been a quadriplegic rather than a partner who could still now and again return a few of her husband’s booming serves. Sari’s mother was too old to help, and Sari’s sister couldn’t leave her four kids and husband in Teaneck. Without hesitation, Ted caught the next plane out of LAX after she called from her hospital bed in Hadassah.

Apartment-bound through the wet, cold winter, they rented old movies, drank gin, played gin and emailed each other love letters between his laptop in the living room and her supersized desktop Mac in the study. He lay on the couch and watched old videos of his play-off matches on YouTube, and she sat bolt upright at her desk and continued to write briefs for the partners in her firm. On special occasions, Ted would get out the quality marijuana from Orange County that he kept in the freezer in a Band-Aid box. As she drew in the thick smoke from his little glass pipe, she explained the impressive list of legal risks that he had run when he smuggled it into Israel. Finally, after a few weeks, Sari wanted to get outside, but he argued that she might slip, might get cold, might jar the halo.

“Relax, Ted,” she’d say. “Let’s show them what a real stiff-necked Jew looks like.”

So on good days, they’d walk along Emek Refaim, where her appearance scared young children and enthralled male teenagers with piercings that were minor league by comparison. Sometimes, for fun, she would lurch along the street like a robot, and even adults would walk into phone poles, craning their necks to keep staring at her as

they passed. Sari claimed she was responsible for at least one traffic accident caused by an amazed gawker.

Never in Ted's series of women had he met anyone like her. For the months in the halo, she wore a little wrench and a screwdriver in a pouch around her neck. He'd find her in the bathroom, squinting into the mirror while she tightened the small screws that held the halo to her skull, as if she were applying makeup. She was determined to fight off depression, so for the convoluted sex that she would not give up, he cut little holes in the vest for her nipples. She posed for him bottomless in front of the mirror and regretted she couldn't go to a Purim party just as she was.

In the end, he stood right in front of Sari and asked her to marry him. He knew she couldn't shake her head, so she had to say, "Sure," straight out; a non-Jewish, unqualified "Sure!" while looking him in the eye (though maybe she did have a bit of a worried expression on her face). He was so happy; they bopped around the apartment doing their robot dance to the sound of the Jackson 5's "Dancing Machine."

The qualifications came later. Would he, could he, convert? Live in Israel a while? Why not? Trivial compared to what Sari went through, and it was no worse than the semi-pro tours of his youth, working his way up to number nine seed on the international circuit until he'd bombed out with a torn cruciate ligament. Back in California, he studied Judaism with a thirty-year-old surfing rabbi still looking for a shul to lead while they waited for sets off of Laguna Beach. In time, Ted impressed the Abrahamicly bearded trio of the Los Angeles *Bet Din* with his sincerity, if not with his Hebrew. Israel needed more Jews, even though he and Sari were too old for kids, so they gave him a pass.

The line stopped again and Ted bumped into the rear of the *frummie* woman who had bent over to feed an irritable toddler sitting in a stroller. The woman flinched and stepped away.

"But, we need to decide what our options are," Sari the lawyer said.

Ted didn't need options. He just wanted her to throw her arms around him and whisper, "It'll be all right. It'll be all right," the way he did for her when she would cry herself to sleep in her halo.

"We're just different," Ted said.

"How different?" Sari said.

"Your Jewish is different. For you it's a tribe, a country. I already had a country. I'm an American. When I converted, I became Jewish, but I didn't become like you," Ted said.

"My Jewish is different?! I work every day for a living. I support us. What's not American? I'm more goyish than you are. You think I'm doing this for fun?"

Sari's Jewishness was bone deep despite her rabbinical Jewish-Latvian father permanently absenting himself from his somewhat less observant wife when Sari was five. Her mother now linked Ted with her ex-husband as *ha-ta'ut ha-gedolah*, the big mistake. Ted used the phrase when he mixed up a dairy spoon with the meaty silverware.

"Yes I do. You love it and you love it more than you love me."

At that moment, a small cockroach scuttled across the tiled floor in front of Sari. On Shabbat, Jews were not allowed to hurt a fly, kill a bug, take a life. He crushed the roach under his untied 200-dollar tennis shoe.

Sari seemed oblivious to her surroundings. "It isn't so much love, Ted. It's what I do. What keeps *us* safe. My work has been more stable than most anything else in my life, including us."

Sari loved choices, but hated to plan, hated to make decisions that necessitated change. On the one hand... and on the other hand... She told Ted that it came from the Talmud—never a clear-cut answer, or an answer only evident when one got to Heaven. Maybe the inability to plan was wired into her genetic code. Man plans, God laughs. A man and a woman marry and plan a life together, while God, the *alter kaker* who cares so much for his Chosen People, retires in a fit of giggles. In the old country, the Pale of the Settlement, you never knew when the Cossacks would come galloping over your fields and lay waste to your town. That's where her familial red hair had come from, Sari told him. Maybe there were a few cultural differences between them after all.

They inched forward toward the very young El Al employees checking passports and profiling the passengers. "So, what is your relationship?" asked a twenty-something Israeli man/boy who wore a

ponytail, a single earring, and a name tag on his chest that said, "Bruce Leibowitz, El Al."

"Not good. Not good at all," Ted answered.

Sari told Bruce that she and Ted were married.

"Ted Christiansen," Ted said, sticking out his hand, hoping maybe Bruce might recognize him from one of his televised matches. He handed Bruce his American passport, which he carried everywhere as he'd not yet received his Israeli identity card.

"But your last name is different." Bruce said, checking his clipboard.

"Yeah, if you were named Cohen, would you trade it in for Christiansen?" She showed Bruce her diamond ring. Ted's people were from Minnesota originally, tall and Nordic. After an appraising look, Bruce smiled and gave Sari a high five. Holding their passports, Bruce disappeared to talk with his supervisor. In Israel, even security is sometimes negotiable.

Bruce was back. "Do you know Hebrew?" Bruce asked.

"*Ani meiveen ivrit ktzat*, I understand Hebrew a little. Ulpan. *Kita aleph*. I flunked out."

"He didn't really flunk out," Sari snapped. "It was a time thing."

"No, Sari. I really did. I dropped out just before the midterm that I would have flunked."

Sari stamped her foot and shook her head with chagrin at the family shame. Bruce shrugged and left them alone.

A short white-haired woman with a matching set of whiskers sprouting from the left of her chin pulled on Sari's sleeve. "You're so angry, why? He looks like a nice man."

"Mixed marriage. Nothing ever good comes." It was a middle-aged man who muttered through a black beard. He faced the opposite direction to Ted and Sari but stood beside them in the maze. White tzitzit tassels hung in front of his black frock coat. A *haredi* woman stood at his side looking straight ahead, nodding at the obvious validity of her husband's comment.

"We must welcome the proselyte. It's repeated over and over in the Bible. What about Ruth? What about Jethro?" An earnest young

yeshiva *bocher* looked up from his small siddur and spoke in English, a full-brimmed black hat set back on his head.

“Jethro didn’t really convert,” said a prosperous-looking man with a well-trimmed salt-and-pepper beard. He wore a Jerusalem baseball cap and carried a camera around his neck.

“And Sammy Davis,” said the small woman still holding onto Sari’s sleeve.

“Too old for babies anyway,” said a bejeweled woman with a nasal Brooklyn accent.

He knew Sari could print out the requisite boilerplate legal forms on her Mac, and with a few signatures the marriage could end. He’d sign a *get*, and free her to marry her third husband. But surrounded by yentas and Torah scholars, he remembered how Sari looked as she lit candles on Friday nights, how they came together after the *mikvah*, the hundred Shabbats they had already shared.

“So what’s it going to be, babe?”

With Sari freed of her halo, their unfettered intimacy along with the increasing demands of her job somehow made things more difficult rather than less. He was left alone in their apartment in a new country with no real purpose. She no longer needed him. After the halo came off, the arguments had started.

“I’m your shiksa!” he yelled at Sari when she complained he had moved stuff from her briefcase.

“With benefits!” she shouted back.

He didn’t understand how all of them could stand waiting patiently, lined up, carrying their belongings, to get on the plane. He wanted to shriek, “This is NOT happening.” The people around them were now quiet. With him, they waited for her answer.

Sari yanked her bag forward in the line and stood silent. Ted could see her struggle. She didn’t give up. Not in a halo, not on the tennis court, and not in an argument.

The restless commentators started up again. “It’s not a good marriage, everyone can see.”

“You don’t walk out when it’s difficult.” “They should talk with a rabbi.”

In the distance, the baggage of the people in front rode the belt up into the X-ray machine serenely, effortlessly.

Sari said quietly, “Ted, I tried over coffee to tell you what bothered me, and you just listed your complaints.”

It was not an answer to his question. “You’re right. I did,” he said.

“And what I want is for you to hear me.”

It took him more than a minute to get it. “That’s what I want too.”

Their witnesses stood silently around them. The line didn’t move. Even the toddler in the stroller ahead of them stopped whimpering for more Bamba. All of them looked immersed in thoughts of their own relationships. To be heard. To be understood. Who among them could ask for more from a loved one? Who among them had that?

“Why did we start arguing in the first place?” Sari asked.

Had it been their temperamental disposal, clogged for the tenth time so the dishwasher overflowed all over the countertop? No, it was the washing machine.

“The washing machine. I threw in your silk dress with the underwear and sheets,” he said.

Sari looked at Ted. “So we’re going to split because of my dress?”

“Well it was an expensive dress, you said..., you yelled..., you screamed.”

Sari sighed, “A dress. I’d almost forgotten.”

“Yeah, a dress. The green one, with the soft silver tones in the skirt. The dress that swirled when you turned. I felt terrible. It had spaghetti straps tied with little bows on your shoulders that I kept wanting to pull loose. The one you wore the first time I took you to dinner.”

He could place a tennis ball in the far backhand corner with precision time and time again, but prowling the apartment these last months, he’d screwed up the little mechanics of everyday living.

“It was only a dress,” the whiskered woman said in a soft voice to the young American couple behind her. The couple was sharing earpieces from his iPod and not following the Ted and Sari show.

Ted took a deep breath and looked at Sari. She raised her head and looked straight back at him, her eyes wet. The killer look with her green eyes darkened was now gone. Ted wasn't sure what had fueled the intensity of their stupid argument, nor was he at all clear why the Sari he had married was back.

"I remember, I remember. No way! How could I forget? You were so hot in that dress." He said it loudly.

There was scattered applause from their audience, and the yeshiva *bocher* whistled between his teeth.

They were nearing the end of the line, and Bruce returned and whispered to Sari in Hebrew.

"He says you have to go, but I don't want you to," she said, slipping her arm around his.

"Easy," he said. He felt some of his pre-marriage mojo return. "I'll move the car, get my gym bag and racket, and..." He was already moving, having the same feeling that he had before a match was won—that he saw his way; he knew what to do. He ducked back through the line of importunate Jews. "...See you at the gate in half an hour. Wherever you go, I go. Upgrade us both to First Class. You're paying!"

Sari felt a tug on her arm from the bewhiskered white-haired lady again who whispered loudly, "*A gut shtikl fleysh vet zikh lozn kostn. Nito keyn metsies.* A good cut of meat will cost you. There are no bargains."

Those in line, even those not paying rapt attention, laughed. With the rest of her tribe, Sari laughed too, though, in the moment, she was glad Ted was not there in need of explanation.

What To Do With the Past

Judy Labensohn

February 24, 1999

Mrs. A. Mandelbaum
Chevrah Kadisha
Jerusalem Religious Council
2 Street of the Lily
Jerusalem

Dear Mrs. Mandelbaum,

A Mrs. Zlota Czlophat from the Deposition Division of the Ministry of the Interior suggested I write you when I asked her what to do with my writings. I am sending you via FedEx (prepaid) four Coke cartons, each with ten notebooks of scribblings (one for each year) about my baby brother. He died on February 24, 1951. The writings have been growing into a mini-Mount Zion next to the television in my living room. (My husband threatened to leave if I didn't "throw them out of the fucking house." That was two years ago. A lot has happened since.)

I have considered all options: shredding, burning, flooding and burial. I can't send the notebooks to any of my kids, because they still blame me for the divorce. They would just send them back. Nor can I send them to my mother in Dubuque, due to the expense and her condition—recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

Shredding seems cruel. Turning my pages about my dead brother Joey into confetti is, I assume you agree, inappropriate.

Burning might work, but since he was cremated I don't have the heart to set my papers on fire.

Flooding would be an option if I had a basement and rain.

Burial seems best.

Mrs. Czlophat told me that for a special fee (which, as I understand, is partially covered by National Insurance), you folks bury

texts in a particular part of the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives. She said any pages on which God's name appears cannot be torn, thrown away or burnt but, rather, must be buried in a genizah.

You have no idea, Mrs. Mandelbaum, how that one small piece of information comforted me. Since that day, I have imagined my papers buried in the dry, gray earth overlooking the City of Peace; my words, Joey's tomb. How comforting to know that my little brother will be looking down on me from that sacred mount. (The rest of the family lives in Iowa.)

Should you take the time to read the text, Mrs. Mandelbaum, you may notice that God's name does not appear on even one page. Don't let this dissuade you. Since God is Truth, I am sure you will agree that God is there, hovering over every participle, each subjunctive clause.

Please place the texts in baskets woven from the fibers of date palms. Last week at the Shrine of the Book, I saw a glass plate from 135 C.E. that had been preserved because it was buried in such a basket. If my texts last half that time—932 years—*dayenu*.

I assume there will be a headstone. I need a stone and a solemn burial. Please inscribe the following in Times Roman, if there's a choice:

JOEY G. STEINBERG
1949–1951

I am happy to pay for greens—preferably myrtle—*ad infinitum*.
Do you know the New England Primer from 1727? I'm thinking of the "H" rhyme:

*My Book and Heart
Shall never part.*

But part they must, Mrs. Mandelbaum, if I am going to continue my life. Noa, my daughter, says *Enough of this Joey nonsense*. She may be jealous of the attention I give to her invisible uncle, but she has a point.

When Mrs. Czlophat mentioned your name, I knew it was you who could help me. It is so appropriate that a Mrs. Mandelbaum deal with

this delicate matter, as the almond tree symbolizes new life. Look out the window (if you have one). I bet you can see one of the almond trees blooming now on Street of the Lily, clusters of pink and white bursting against the gray sky.

It is no coincidence that I write you today, the 24th of February, Mrs. Almond Tree. I feel confident you will answer my call. Thank you in advance for your pedantic attention to detail, which Mrs. Czlophat said you possess. Details, as you must know from your line of work, make the dead live.

Sincerely,

Josefa Steinberg, Jerusalem

May 22, 1999

Dear Mrs. Stynberg,

Mrs. Applebaum has been on how you say “protecting the pregnancy” for the past month and I now dealing with her issues. I read your letter. I open the boxes and I am reading your story called *Diving Into Mount Zion* about your baby brother as much as I can because my English is not so good. My son Baruch did his Bar Mitzvah on Mount Zion. It took me a long time to read so that’s why you don’t hear from the Religion Council since your February epistle (I just look up that word). Maybe we can meet and I teach you Hebrew and you teach me English. I like the story you invented very much. Your writing is very interesting to me. I also write at times but in Hebrew. I share much sadness for you.

Meanwhile hear in the office I am protecting your Coke boxes from the cleaning ladies. My number is 02-5233780/ 201.

Sincerely,

Shimi Shimoni, Religion Council

June 2, 1999

Dear Mr. Shimoni,

I tried calling you several times but there was no answer. Thank you for your kind letter. I was so upset I hadn't heard from your office earlier that I explored another idea. Lately, as you may know, the kibbutzim have opened some of their agricultural land for secular burials. I went to Kibbutz Maaleh Hahamisha and talked to the man in charge of their new cemetery. He agreed to bury my papers, though he explained that National Insurance will not participate in the costs. My brother was a secular Jew, or actually, now that I think of it, maybe he wasn't even a Jew. Who knows if he ever had a *brit*. I never thought of this when I wrote your office in February. As you saw in *Diving Into Mount Zion*, he was born a vegetable. I don't know if doctors performed *brit mila* on green-bean babies in 1949. I don't know if all this even matters re: burying my papers.

I will come pick up the boxes during the week after the celebrations for the Six Day War. Can you get me permission to park a pick-up outside the main door? My back is bad. Meanwhile, I appreciate your reading and guarding my writings. It's so difficult to know what to do with the past; it takes up so much space. Actually, even now as I write I am rethinking everything. Maybe I *will* burn the papers and sprinkle the ashes in the Dead Sea. That is certainly the cheapest solution.

Let me know when you're in the office. I look forward to meeting you when I come.

Sincerely,

Josefa Steinberg

June 11, 1999

Dear Mrs. Stynberg,

I don't know how to say this. I feel so poorly. This morning when I am coming to work I see the cartons are not there under my desk. I ask Moti the man in charge of the cleaning ladies what happened and he tells me to call Fatma the woman in charge of morning clean. I call Fatma but she can't talk because her son throws stones at Border Policeman and is now going to the Kishleh and she is crying on the sofa. I am so upset about this. I have no idea who did what with your past. All I can say is if you still want to come here, I would be honored to meet you. We can sit in the cafeteria downstairs and talk about the past. Shuki is making a good strong coffee for us.

I am here on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 7:30 until 12:00 when I am going to study whole books.

I am crying with you.

Your friend,

Shimi

June 26, 1999

Dear Mr. Shimoni,

All four cartons? All forty notebooks? Gone?

This is disastrous. How could this happen? You're a government agency, after all. I wanted a ceremony. I need a ritual, something to help me say goodbye, *au revoir*, *arrivederci*, *shalom*.

I must think about my next step. I can't think now. How could my past disappear? Someone must have seen it. Four Coke cartons take up a lot of space. (Ask my ex-husband.) Is there no record? What about Moti? Doesn't he oversee his workers?

I'll come soon to meet you. I hope you can introduce me to Fatma or at least give me her address.

I guess after all these years and all this scribbling in order to bring my baby brother back to life, I am left with only this: one nice man who knows my story.

Still, I'm pissed.

Josefa Steinberg

P.S. Did Mrs. Mandelbaum give birth?

July 29, 1999

Dear Mrs. Stynberg,

I talked to Moti. On the day your past disappeared Moti is celebrating the freeing of the Kotel, I am studying about Amalek, and Fatma is crying for her son. So nobody is how you saying it "watching the store".

Maybe this disappearing of your past is the hand of G-d. This idea is coming to me when I pray last week on Tisha B'Av, when the Temple is destructing.

I will wait for you on a Tuesday that is a double good day. We have much pain to share as my son Baruch who had the Bar Mitzvah on Mount Zion is not hear in Israel now. He has gone from Israel for Iowa, a place I heard first from you. How can it be that a son of Israel goes out from his country and from his homeland where we have suffered so much and from his father's house to a place with wild Indians?

I am waiting for you to come on Tuesday.

Sincerely,

Shimi

B.S. Mrs. Mandelbaum had a baby boy but there is many problem.

August 20, 1999

Dear Shimi,

It has taken me a few weeks to process what has happened. Naturally, I was frantic when I first heard about the loss of my four Coke boxes. Now I am beginning to think you may be right. Maybe God is telling me to stop mourning the past. Who needs a little brother watching her from the Mount of Olives?

True, I felt a strong need for a ceremony or a ritual. Now I am learning to accept there will be none.

Since I dropped off the boxes in your office, other stories have begun to fill my emptiness. You have helped me so much, Mr. Shimi Shimoni, in ways you can't imagine.

I will come on Tuesday, August 31st at 10 a.m. with a special gift for you, another text I have been saving for too long, one I am now ready to give up: my State Report on Iowa (including the map!) from 1956.

See you soon,

Josefa

P.S. Please send me Mrs. Mandelbaum's phone number.

The Game

Deborah Danan

“1-2-3 here I come!” I heard Tatte say in a stage whisper from the hallway. My five-year-old brother Yankele and I were hiding in the cupboard under the stairs under piles of *shmattes* Mama used back in the days when she still cleaned the floors. I heard the sounds of Tatte opening and shutting cupboard doors in the kitchen.

“Where are they?” he said, “Could they be in the larder? No, not in here.”

Yankele giggled and I cupped my hand around his mouth.

“Shush Yankelush, he’ll hear you,” I whispered in my brother’s ear.

“Are they under the bed?” My father’s voice rang out again, “No, not under here. Maybe they’re behind the cabinet? Wrong again. Where did those *kinderlach* disappear to?”

I marveled at how long it was taking for Tatte to find us. Had I been playing this game with my friend Zelda, I have no doubt she would have found us by now. I heard Tatte’s heavy footsteps approaching the cupboard door. His shadow blocked the chink of light that was seeping in from the space between the door and the floor.

“Hmm, the cleaning closet,” came Tatte’s voice again, “I wonder if they’re hiding in there?”

Yankele could no longer suppress his excitement and when he let out a high-pitched laugh, I instinctively covered his mouth again.

“What is this?” Tatte said, “The closet is laughing? Since when do closets laugh?”

Despite my restraining hand, Yankele erupted into fits of giggles. Tatte opened the closet door. He lifted the cloths high in the air and exposed our hiding place. By now Yankele was uncontrollable and grabbing on to me, squealing in delight. Tatte bent down and picked him up. I followed them into the sparse living room where Tatte shook his head as he sat down into the battered armchair he so adored. He held Yankele in his arms.

“Yankelush, your sister found you a good hiding place and hid you very nicely.” Tatte kissed Yankele’s forehead. But as he held my brother’s face in his hands his smile disappeared and was replaced with the same look that Mama had when she heard *tzorres* about friends we knew. “I am proud of you,” he said to me, “—both of you. But remember, Yankelush, this is a game that you mustn’t lose. ” Yankele started to cry softly. “How do I make you understand, *zeiseh kinderlach*? If the Germans come looking for you, there will be no second chances. One sound and we will *all* lose the game.”

The Woman in the White Headscarf

Yael Unterman

The clock ticks. There she sits, in her white headscarf. I sit on the other side of the room, staring at my old, brown, veined hands. I know every callus, every scratch. I think of all the places those hands have been. Earning my living one Egyptian pound at a time in the deathly heat, muscles aching, sweat trickling down my armpits.

The clock ticks, the one that belonged to her grandmother. I know her profile well, the beaky nose, the hard eyes. The white headscarf. *Jameela*. We sit in silence.

When we were first married my name was on her lips. Mustapha, my husband, she would murmur with pride. Her eyes were softer then. My name has not crossed her lips in twenty years. As if it is the name of a devil or a curse. She refers to me as “That man.” She beckons me with a grunt.

The room is overstuffed. I do not need all this furniture. Our son bought it for us. European furniture—lime green, like a rotten tree. It is foreign. My bones sink into it in a foreign fashion. There is a picture of him on the mantelpiece, tall, smiling, holding a camel by a leash. I miss him. I miss Egypt. This place is grey, with red-roofed houses and people who look like their skins have been bleached by a washerwoman.

Outside our house there is a trimmed hedge. Sometimes I go outside for a walk. How can she just sit there in silence? How can I?

My next lifetime will surely be better than this one. I imagine myself a rich man. My wife will count herself lucky. She will not ignore me, opening her mouth only to spit out complaints, like balls of chewed tobacco. She will wash my feet and look at me with admiration.

Now I am old. I do not know when I was born. I think I am eighty-three. I go outside. My breath becomes tight and choked. I stumble against the hedge, green and verdant. I collapse, making no sound. I lie

on the ground, barely breathing. The minutes tick by, but no one comes.

A tunnel of light opens before me, and with it, a searing pain. Sixty years of frozen love. Sixty years of lost moments. It is not my failing lungs that torture me, but regret.

My soul, ripping from my body, cries: *O Jameela. I will see you again on the other side.*

Israel—September 2004

Mark Mirsky

One can send notes to friends, but to be read beyond the circle of a single reader is to state certainties, whereas the few weeks I spent in Israel during September 2004 left me without any. One moment I felt as if I belonged here, and ought long ago to have put down deep roots, and another that by sending down roots in New York City and Boston I have something to contribute when I come here that I could never have brought otherwise. I still agonize over my inability with Hebrew, though of course my weekly attendance in the synagogue and all the work I have done on biblical storytelling have give me more fluency that I might have suspected. Max Apple remarked to me last year at the Bar Mitzvah of a friend's son in Philadelphia—"You are the only person I know who can bring Donald Barthelme and Rabbi Soloveitchik into the same conversation." That combination seems to have wound into my lectures here, as I balance the spirit of religion and magic in the telling of stories. (To Elsa Dorman, a mutual friend of Bob's, I write—"You were amused no doubt to hear that I taught Robert Creeley's 'Mr. Blue' to this class of students, native English speakers who have all made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, some of them religious, all of them wound into a landscape of dreams.") I come to preach the riddle, upset the apple cart of "naturalism," not too hard in a world where what is half fiction is often what is most important. To speak to others of how precious language, the English language, is to me, and, perhaps in some uncanny way, to cross its roots with Hebrew.

What follows is in part a patchwork of sentences from e-mails sent to friend, in part a journal that I find myself beginning in the middle, late in my stay.

The night of Erev Yom Kippur, I experienced something that made it hard to wait until after the fast and the caesura from writing so that I

might set it down. I lived in Katamon, high on the crest of a hill, which descends to the old German Colony where my wife, Inger, the children and I were in residence for five months in 1986. Three good friends of mine live there (the agent Sharon Friedman and two poets: Linda Zisquit, who studied with and remained close to Robert Creeley until his death several months after these events, and Lisa Katz, who was a managing editor of the magazine I edit, *Fiction*, and who translated Aharon Appelfeld for us). I would often wander down to their kitchens and enjoy the action along the main thoroughfare, Emek Refaim. The street has a café life through the evening and one place, the Coffee Mill, became a regular perch because of its cappuccino and the crisp biscuits baked by the owner, Debby. Just down the street a lethal bombing took place not long ago, at a now refurbished, elegant glass-enclosed café, the Hillel. The sense of danger along the crowded sidewalks was never quite absent.

But on the eve of *Yom Kippur* a sudden absolute hush fell over the streets, an urban stillness that I had not experienced since childhood. Emek Refaim, a thoroughfare usually buzzing with buses, automobiles and motor scooters, was deserted of all traffic and filled with people strolling. I might have expected that, but I did not expect the horde of kids on bicycles, whizzing through the quiet. As I walked down to services from my apartment high on the hill, from every side street, children of all sizes, infants on tiny bikes with training wheels, adolescents on shiny racers or off-road models, came pouring down into the thoroughfares, racing down to Emek Refaim or pumping up from it. At first I thought it was only secular Israel that was showing its indifference to the holiday, but as I sat on a bench on the Emek, after evening prayers, mesmerized by the crowds wandering back and forth from synagogue, or from houses, having shed their synagogue clothes and back on the street in more relaxed tailoring, I saw that children of the shul-goers were out on bikes, too. Suddenly it was safe to take a bike into the streets, and even the main avenue belonged to these myrmidons, these packs of kids, shouting and racing up and down.

As if to prove the altered nature of the street, two young boys with skullcaps lay down on their backs on the paving of the Emek Refaim's busiest intersection, laughing, demonstrating to themselves the

miracle of the absent traffic. It was a brave gesture, given the whizzing of the bicycles by their heads.

On the way back from the *Neilah* service, the end of the holiday, cars began to appear along the streets. One wanted to wave them back and let the stillness tarry. The sense of suspended holiness that had seized the streets and held them breathless for twenty-four hours wafted away. For a moment Jerusalem had belonged to itself; its walkers, its children, and even its bicycles seemed appropriate to the hush. For a Day of Awe it had become a city that had cupped in its alleys and streets an atmosphere not quite of this earth, or perhaps of earth as it could be freed of its normal rounds of business.

Here in Jerusalem one wanders between one set of friends who are in such frustration with the State of Israel that they are ready to tear it up and run away, and others where the dangerous tribal eyes flash with the fire of zeal to extend the pastures ever forward, enlarging the tent pegs. In one house they were convinced that Sharon never meant to give back Gaza; in another they are not only convinced but think it is the beginning of the unraveling of everything and so it must be opposed at all costs. There are many more Ethiopian students on the Bar-Ilan campus than I would have expected and a fair number of Arab women as well (the latter obvious only because of their dress). The Humanities are evidently not the recipients of the university's greatest largess, and there is an air of making do in the corridors of the English Department, which does not occupy one of the shiny new buildings. Still, there is a sense of common undertaking among secretaries and students and an eagerness in my students that means everything to me. One of the most talented thanks me for coming, and another finds a printer for me and invites me to her wedding. The sole Indian student, who has come to the writing of fiction from his work as a computer expert, takes the time to read one of my novellas and send me a long note about it. When I leave, he goes to the trouble, without telling me, of gathering up the other students' manuscripts and creating a Web site in my name. They all talk about the class and leave

a box on the Web site for my response. I don't talk much about the class in these pages, since I want to respect my students' privacy, but despite the fierce struggles that break out in the classroom, I am amazed at their willingness, despite the differences in their lives, religious, non-religious, sexual mores, to share secrets with each other through their writing. And they influence me in more mundane ways as well; since the bombing in Beer Sheba, I've gotten into the habit of taking taxis back and forth to Jerusalem, in response to the cries of my children that I stay as far out of danger as I can, but my students all take the bus, and so it feels cowardly.

I have said nothing of the eerie charm of this place, which is intensified by the terror that runs up and down one's backbone. One jokes, but... A woman on the faculty in Biology who has taken some literature courses with the professor I am standing with, introduced to me when she walks up, winces at the edge of what could be taken in an ill moment as male chauvinism. (Trying to strike up some common acquaintanceship, I talk about the discoverer of DNA, James Watson, who once offered to take a girlfriend of mine with him to Stockholm, and his predilection for pretty lab assistants.) The biologist walks away, shaking her head at me. My friend, the professor, whispers that she lost her only son a year or two ago, in the Army. So then, under the courtesy, one feels the blood sacrifice, too sad for any words or banter.

A friend asks what Israel is like. I reply that I am so busy at the university and there are so many friends to see, and such a short time, that I barely have time to walk the streets as I want to and fall into the landscape. Above all, this biblical landscape that I woke to speech in as a three-year-old, its stories wound through my very earliest dreams, speaks to me. There is a relatively new road, 443, that goes through a long stretch of the "territories" or West Bank between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. A colleague driving me to the University, which lies just outside Tel Aviv—and on the edge of Kiryat Ono, where I have a cousin I ought to call, but just can't bring myself to cram into my already hysterically overbooked last few days—asks if I mind driving

through the “territories.” It’s too late to object, even if I wanted to, and I am fascinated by the bleak but moving landscape of the Arab villages in the stony, dry hills, brown in the rainless September. I am in love with them. Can’t they stay this way? Can’t we find our way back together, Jew and Arab, to that common fount of myth and history in these stones?

The fact of the new road, and of the building everywhere in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, hotel after hotel, strikingly tall, and sometimes radically experimental in their architecture, as is true at times of the new apartment buildings, one stacked upon another on broad boulevards. They point to a future that has already displaced the former reality of Israel. It gives one a sense of how deep the foundations are that have been struck by the modern state and how foolish the temporary hysteria of the American Jewish community is about the survival of the state. It must come as a shock to the Palestinians. This is no third-world infrastructure, whatever shortcuts are being taken. And yet under everything is this nervous, anxious fear that there is no peace, and the land itself trembles with uncertainty. Every bombing registers like an earthquake, warning that there is a peal of doom hanging over one’s head. (For two days after an incident, I am told, traffic accidents radically decrease, then shoot up again.) This common sense of being vulnerable, that neither money nor social position can guarantee anything, serves as an ointment that smoothes away the harsh edges of Israel life, bringing together the taxi driver and his customer, bonding the black-hat-and-white-shirt religious with the secular. However Israelis rage against each other in private, and find each other’s way of life peculiar or unattractive, they sense that they are in the boat together. I feel this in my class, which is made up of such very different students, and yet they all care for each other, in a way that is inconceivable in the United States. They will see each other again, they know. They try to understand each other, though their life styles are in such opposition.

The chairman of the English Department, Michael Kramer, has lost a family member in the bombing of the coffee shop on Emek Refaim. He talks about how hard it has been for the family to recover—he has been going to a series of ceremonies, as the parents struggle to keep

the memory of the bride and the father who were killed alive. And when I call my friend, Sharon Friedman, who has been busy arranging a reception for me, her voice is shaking. "I've had a terrible day," she announces. She came home to find her cleaning lady in hysteria. The woman's first cousin was one of the soldiers killed in Gaza during an infiltration into a settlement that morning, a twenty-one-year-old boy. Sharon takes her home where people are crying, fainting. There is a child of the dead soldier in the corner. The personal nature of this society reaches into my chest and tugs there. I begin the Fast of Yom Kippur, balancing the sweetness of the streets full of young and old trekking to the synagogues, against the price that is being paid for the presence of Jews on this hill and the slopes around it.

In the morning, there was a cry in the street as if someone was calling to a girl lingering behind in the house. I heard it at first as a high whining shriek, "Shaynii, Shaynii," and wondered why Shaynii did not hurry up and join her mother, but as it did not die away, but seemed to come closer, persisting for five, six minutes, I went out on the balcony and, looking down, saw a Bedouin or Arab woman in the black and red embroidered costume of her village, a box of figs on her head, swaying slowly, piercing the valley of stone houses on Ha-Portsim. Her bare feet were black with the dust of the road; her embroidered skirts swept behind her as the soles and heels lifted naked from the asphalt. The sight of them was almost forbidden.

I understood the cry then, "*Te'enim, te'enim.*" Biblical Jerusalem was still alive in this solitary figure threading down and up the hillside's byways, offering the fruit of her own backyard to its inhabitants.

During a long walk back to my apartment late one Friday night, I noted the sudden presence of three massive animals at the corner of King David Street. I was coming up out of the valley that separates the Old City from West Jerusalem, having left the generous table of the novelist, Allen Hoffman, who lives in the Old Jewish Quarter. Allen had walked me down through the deserted *Souk* to the Jaffa Gate, where

we had then stood, talking on and on about writers and books. (Imagining assassination at every step, I would never have ventured there alone at midnight, but Allen went up and down the polished steps through the shuttered alley with aplomb, explaining that it was relatively safe.) And so I dipped down into the deserted park and found a path up, feeling as if his mantle still protected me. At the very lip of the sparse traffic moving along on David Ha-Melech, just before the Liberty Bell Gardens, those large dogs suddenly appeared. I was glad not to have met them further down in the park, where the territory would have belonged to them alone. German shepherds on the loose, wild, or wolves—they looked at me, summing up what they ought to do, and then the leader turned the others aside onto another path. I would have been hard put to defend myself had they come rushing forward; I was not carrying even a pocket knife, just a cloth backpack. From deep in the valley below, no one would have heard my cries had they sprung at me. I felt like meat, no more. Like the cats hunting everywhere in the streets, the dogs are evidence of the land's wild character, just barely held in check.

The first night here, Sharon Friedman swept me up at eleven in the evening, dismissing my jet lag to walk into the heart of *Meah She'arim*, to witness a night of marriage festivities in the great hall of the sect called *Toldot Aharon*.

In a set of rising bleachers, a truly surreal sight, swaths of this sect of *Haredim* in beautiful white silk coats striped in narrow, almost invisible blue, and then the black coats of visiting Chassidic sects intermingled. The expressions were naked and direct, locked there as if painted so that one stared and stared; as if the boys had swallowed the life of a great grandfather and it had broken out in their cheeks. One of them, who could not have been more than fourteen, still beardless, half turned toward me, his lips and nose twisted into the irritation one might read on a man of fifty or sixty, almost a caricature of an angry Jewish face in a Polish pickle factory of 1890. I saw only the faintest echoes of such an expression when I was a child of six or

seven, and the grandchildren of such characters were in their eighties.

Across the great space of the inner synagogue, on the steep bleachers that rose almost to the high ceiling, one saw the beatific smiles of old men lost in dreams of childhood innocence, eyebrows raised in an ecstasy that might have seemed too theatrical in a production of the *Dybbuk*. Here they not only were believable but beckoned one to come into their ranks. In one row after another so many contrasting, directly-displayed emotions, although the robes of white striped with blue lines were identical and bearded according to the age of the figure; the effect of the whole was of a living icon, like the serried ranks of saints in the old churches of Novgorod. One felt the presence of Russia in this room, the long sojourn there of Aaron's generations.

At the Coffee Mill, nibbling the hard finger of cookie, cherry or nuts baked into it and the print of the owner's fingers, I work on a novel, make notes for a new short story, but it's the sweet stillness that I want to savor, the faces at the tables around me that I surreptitiously try to read. There are so many "characters" and "meshuggeshs" parading along the street, all of whom I seem to know, recalling those I grew up with in the Jewish streets of my childhood. And when I see those moments when a young woman or man seems to personify the grace of youth that made me dizzy in the adolescent girls of Dorchester, a sense of it threading through my own life flashes into existence, that strange identification with a tribe that is both dangerous and yet perhaps the deepest source of human satisfaction, as it promises a world that will weave one into an existence beyond oneself.

At my student Judith Labensohn's house (Judy is a from the Midwest, already a mature writer when she joins our class), I met Rabbi Herbert Weiner, the author of the book *Nine and a Half Mystics*, who, it turns

out, is originally from Dorchester Lower Mills, the lone Jewish boy in an Irish neighborhood. He suffered as I did at The Boston Public Latin School. He was devoted through high school to the strippers at the Old Howard, and we shared a laugh over that common experience of maturing in Boston in the 1950's—though I did not dare cross the burlesque house's threshold until I was a senior in high school. Weiner's Russian companion made one of the best dishes on the table, the mushroom and rice stew—for it was Judy Labensohn's Rosh Hashanah lunch, which was macrobiotic. The Russian mushrooms with their subtle taste transformed the surrounding rice. Judy however, sent me off with her own bowl of rice, purposely bland since my stomach flu was raging. At home I poured the mushroom soup mix I had made earlier into it and warmed it up as a stew.

I came close to being murdered in the taxi that took me back to Jerusalem one evening. Traffic suddenly slowed just ahead of us, and the driver, who seemed to be in another world, had to brake abruptly as the back of the car in front of us suddenly loomed only inches ahead. He shrugged apologetically as he swung into the next lane at about 120 kilometers per hour. Had there been any traffic on our tail it would have crashed into us, or we would have been clipped by cars rushing up in the lane we were cutting into.

I looked at him, not quite comprehending what had happened. After a moment's pause, he remarked by way of explanation, "I was watching Sharon's motorcade—come the other way."

After a shaken moment or two, I replied, "You mean I almost had the honor of being killed by General Sharon?"

My driver smiled modestly, in the affirmative.

I go out to Yad Vashem, to meet Rita, a librarian I met in Pinsk when I visited my father's town deep in the swamps of Byelorussia (White Russia) in the early Nineties. She has since made *aliyah* but goes back

to Pinsk, and has valuable information for me. Our eyes glow with mutual joy meeting each other again, as she was my savior in a town where I was lost, not speaking a word of Russian except for “ice cream”, which I knew from my father’s enthusiastic descriptions of it in his childhood, and her name my only contact when I got off the bus from Brest-Litovsk.

After synagogue the next day, my friend, the biblical critic, Edward Greenstein, who, with his wife, Beverly, has invited me to have lunch with them in their *sukkah*, remarks that Jews from abroad are no longer afraid to come to Israel, as almost half the seats are filled by visitors. Beverly, who was a driving force for innovation and educational excellence at my children’s school in New York City, Ramaz, came to Israel with her husband to try to accomplish the same revolution within the public school system here. She was struggling with the bureaucracy, however, and became involved in an administrative dispute with the school system (happily, since this was written, resolved). Sharon Friedman, one of whose children attended Beverly’s school, and who thinks the world of her, tells me how the girls went down to City Hall spontaneously to protest the way Beverly, their former headmistress, was being treated. On all sides one hears from the Americans and other English-speaking immigrants impatience at the stubborn, entrenched bureaucracy, of teachers, secretaries, administrators, who barely work but are part of a corrupt system. As a veteran of City College’s woes, I can sigh with sympathy. Still, one feels here the messianic impatience, and it carries over to the politics as well. A lawyer here, a native Israeli, has worked ceaselessly for Palestinian and Bedouin rights, often taking on cases without compensation; his wife says of him to me, “He doesn’t care about them. He cares about the State of Israel.” I understand what she means. If that sense of being just to others, of being “good,” and then better than “good,” is lost, then the modern state, for all of its powerful infrastructure, cannot endure.

I want to believe that it can be better, that something wonderful is

possible. I see it in my students' eyes.

Again, a moment not recorded but remembered, on the day before Rosh Hashanah, from every nook and cranny, old couples, and single old men and ladies, seem to crowd everyone else off the sidewalks. In the supermarkets, hardly able to walk, they nevertheless wobble with huge shopping carts full of food for the holidays. My cousin in Tel Aviv remarks some weeks later—"It's as if a war is about to break out and they are stocking up for the next six months." I am not talking about the aged one might see in the streets of Manhattan or Cambridge, Massachusetts, but bodies so twisted and gnarled that they seem to have tumbled out of old age- and nursing homes. One man bent exactly in two I meet several times, large bags of groceries like heavy old clock pendants hanging from his two hands as he makes his way painfully up the street. One would stop and ask him if he needed help except for the fierce determination in his walk.

Out of taxis, before Rosh Hashanah, one ancient after another is being dislodged at the doorway of a house they have come to visit as the matriarch or patriarch.

In one of my letters, I recorded a moment experienced while climbing up the hill to Katamon. I was returning from a delicious meal at on the eve of Rosh Hashanah with friends in the German Colony, when I saw a young woman of sixteen or seventeen, walking down one of the side streets wrapped in light, diaphanous shawls that seemed to float in the breeze around her. She looked in her tall bearing like one of those heroines of the Bible. The shadows of that text in the cool Jerusalem night, where the sunshine of the day still radiated from the stones in warm currents, took her into the time of myth and childhood belief. She was the Rachel of Jacob fleeing his brother's wrath, or Rebecca being brought to Isaac. The city in such moments promises to open secret gates.

“Jerusalem, where fun comes to die,” one of the professors, who lives in Tel Aviv, quips to me. One has come here, however, to wrestle and fall in love with the unnamable, to hear the tread of ghosts.

On the last day of my stay in Jerusalem, Judy Labensohn takes me first to the blessing of the priests, or Kohanim, at the Western Wall, and then into the Old City to buy a rug at one of the Arab stores. The contrast is not only striking but, in terms of the discipline of History, fascinating. (I recall it now in the light of a conversation at a table in Cambridge several weeks after my return with a friend, a professor of History, who expressed some temporary pessimism about its importance to undergraduates.) One did not simply see it but was thrust into the middle of it, the experience of thousands of pilgrims squeezing through the narrow alleyways of the city, pressed up against each other, the religious in their black costumes and the secular in multicolored slacks, short skirts, blouses, to hear the blessings sound from the wall and the trumpet of the ram's horn. “I’m a *Ko-hayn*,” a latecomer in the Orthodox black hat, shaking a beard, cries, trying to elbow a path through the line packed from wall to wall with baby carriages, infants, the very old, the middle-aged in business suits, leisure suits, girls in long skirts, young people in shorts, a heterogeneous but patient crowd, inching toward the security check and the stairways that go down to the Wailing Wall. It becomes obvious after thirty minutes in which we travel perhaps forty feet around one corner, then another, that every place in the plaza is taken and that none of us will get down there before the moment when the descendants of the family of Aaron bless this multitude.

Finally giving up the descent, my friend and I follow a few shrewd members of the crowd who go to the side of the security check rather than trying to get down, where the panorama of the crowd and the wall spread out before one from a narrow footway. The sight produces a strange sense of how the past recurs. For fleeting seconds one grasps the world of the three Temple festivals when crowds came up to the city. It is the disparity between the young tourists who look like they

are coming from the New Jersey shore, the Midwest, California, Australia, speaking English, their arms and legs bare, in clothes tight enough to advertise their joy in the body, and the black cloaks, jackets, sweeping shapeless skirts of those who are immersed in religious rituals day and night, all melded together under the hot sun, that seems to evoke what the crowds of two thousand years ago must have resembled. My student, Judith, who wrote a regular column for the Jerusalem Post when it was still a liberal paper, finds herself unexpectedly moved, and I feel some of this too—the way the past can echo through one's life.

Afterwards we go into the almost deserted Arab quarters. Security has doubled the number of soldiers guarding the main streets of access to look at a rug. I want to take something away of that Bedouin world, which always seems to me the closest approximation of the Patriarchs (and Matriarchs, who are still busy weaving them). A shop has been recommended by a friend of my student, a guide whom we encountered at the Jaffa Gate coming into the Old City. The guide told us to mention his name but not to try to bargain. "He will give you a good price."

When we enter the shop, mentioning the guide's name, the proprietor warns us that he doesn't bargain. "I understand that," I say. "We were told to trust you." We are offered coffee, but I don't want to accept it until I am sure I will buy a rug. This upsets the owner a bit, since it is part of the ritual, but we sit down to coffee after I make my purchase. Then amidst the pleasantries the owner says that he has been to the Bar Mitzvah of a friend of my student, attending the synagogue in West Jerusalem where it took place. The bitterness of the Israeli grip on the West Bank and the Old City bubbles up in the merchant's conversation. He speaks of a dozen slights his daughter received, studying at the Hebrew University and at another one of the Israeli universities, though she scored among the highest of its students, affronts she continues to experience as she waits for a residency to begin at Hadassah hospital. Reading between the lines—he talks about racing in his Mercedes Benz towards Nablus to extract some Israeli friends from a dangerous situation; two of his children are rising in the hierarchy of Israeli institutions despite the

resistance—one takes some hope that things may very slowly get better.

The owner, who was entertaining an American guest when we entered his shop, has the crisp professional air of a professor or a corporate executive. He complains about the lack of police protection on the West Bank. He owns property both there and in Israel proper, but he details the way the civil society of his Palestinian town has crumbled away in the last few years. There is no protection from common criminals. He keeps apologizing for his anger, which I try to prevent, assuring him that I want to hear what he really feels. At the end he suddenly blurts out that the tomb of Joseph and the tomb of Rachel have no historical reality, and that the insistence on the part of religious Jews that they do is just a fraud, perpetuated to cheat the Palestinians. I don't answer since I have no real knowledge as to how far back these sites have been identified with the biblical world. (I suspect that the tomb of Rachel dates at least to the Byzantine era, which is certainly old enough to command respect.) Suddenly the melancholy of both sides strikes me—Jonathan Boyarin wrote very feelingly in a book I reviewed, *Wrestling with Zion*, about the Arab villages on the road up to Jerusalem from the coast that were forcefully evacuated by the Israelis and whose former occupants sadly visit them from time to time. The denial by many Israelis of the Arab history in the land is wrong, but so is this angry refusal to recognize the tomb of Rachel, visited for at least a thousand years, as a holy place, by wandering Jews trying to return. (The Jewish Encyclopedia cites one of the early Christians, Eusebius, mentioning it, and Jewish sources dating from the tenth century.) My own first thoughts about Israel and the Palestinians recur to me from my visit almost thirty years ago—until both sides begin to respect the irrational hold of the place on the other, peace is going to be impossible. I do absorb with pleasure from the proprietor of the shop a history of the rug I have bought, woven by a tribe along the border of present-day Iraq. That history is enough for us to part with smiles and assurances we may see each other and do business again.

When earlier, he reached the point of almost choking on his own anger, and we stared across an abyss of pain that seemed

unbridgeable, I tried to calm him by recalling how bitter the racial struggle in the United States had once seemed. No one could have hoped twenty years ago, in particular on the City College campus, that if not resolved, it would be succeeded by feelings of mutual respect, even affection. I feel now in my classes in New York City how most of my students try to understand each other, regardless of what worlds they come from. He bowed his head, and muttered a prayer. Such hope had to come from on high, and I could say, "Amen," to that but also believe in that moment since it had happened in my experience. And it could in his as well. It was exactly that surrender of one's personal ghosts to an overarching reality that could cure as well as cripple. He had complained about the high cost of educating his children, and I burst in, "You have done the right thing. Education is the best investment of all." Suddenly our eyes caught each other as two fathers, proud of their stake in their children's lives, and we laughed together, in the present, having found a common identity.

Marcela Sulak

Interviewed by Janice Weizman

Poet, teacher, scholar and translator in five languages, Marcela Sulak has made the permutations of language the center of her life. She took on the role of Director of the Shaindy Rudoff Graduate Program in Creative Writing at Bar-Ilan this spring.

Marcela was born and raised in Texas. She earned an MFA and an MA at the University of Notre Dame and received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Texas at Austin, where she concentrated on Poetics and American Literature, and received a certificate in European Studies. Upon completion of her Ph.D., she was hired by the American University in Washington, DC as an Assistant Professor of Literature.

*She is a four-time recipient of the Academy of American Poetry Prize, and has won five FLAS prizes for her work in Czech and Yiddish. She has read at the Library of Congress, and her poems have appeared in Verse Daily and on Washington, DC metro buses. She is the author of two collections of poetry: *Immigrant* (2010), and the chapbook, *Of All The Things That Don't Exist, I Love You Best* (2008). She has translated three book-length collections of poetry from Congo-Zaire and 19th century Bohemia, and has worked as a freelance writer and teacher in Venezuela, Germany, and the Czech Republic. Last spring she immigrated to Israel with her young daughter. Taking pains not to wake her, Marcela and I spoke at her Tel Aviv apartment.*

JW: How do you see your poetry and your scholarship working together? Your doctoral dissertation is entitled, *Ligatures of Time and Space: 1920s New York as a construction site for "American" identity in the long lyric poem*. On the face of it that doesn't seem to have a lot to do with your own poetry.

MS: They are both about immigrants—my own poems and the poems I write about. The book I'm currently writing from my dissertation

examines book-length poems written in and about New York in the 1920s by immigrants, or Southern migrants, who were writing self-consciously “American” poems, but not necessarily in English. So I’m asking, what does “American” mean, especially if you’re writing “American” poems in Yiddish, or Spanish, or French? Part of the answer is the Whitman effect—the long lines, the free verse, the colloquial cadences.

But actual immigrants were not only immigrating to America, they were entering a new experience of time and space, for remember, 1920s New York was the most “modern” or technologically advanced city in the world. There were electric lights, elevators and skyscrapers, automobiles, airplanes, subways, traffic lights. And their poetry reflected new sensations of time, new configurations of space.

In addition, immigrants felt they were living two lives simultaneously. As if the past they left behind them in the old world were still going on without them, and in their new, modern lives, they felt out of place, out of step, so to speak. There was no continuity between the two. So what I think is American about these poems is the sensation of dislocated time, or disjointed space.

This is part of the theme behind my poetry collection, *Immigrant*. If, in my scholarly book, I’m showing the disjunction between times and places (a typically modernist preoccupation) in my poetry, I’m more concerned with bridging the gaps between places and peoples.

JW: I was wondering about that title, because it’s not a theme that really jumps out at me as I read the poems.

MS: You can’t think of immigrants as people who receive second passports, though there are poems about illegal and legal immigrants in Texas, immigration quotas, and poems about vegetables as immigrants, and fruits as castaways. The review of this book that I’m proudest about says the book takes a “deeply nuanced view of what immigration really is and means, a take that’s light years more humane and sophisticated than that of our current U.S. political discourse on this subject.” It makes me so happy.

JW: Who were your influences in terms of poetry?

MS: Wallace Stevens, C.D. Wright, Jorie Graham, Gerald Stern, Caroline Forche, Yehuda Amichai, Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo, Elizabeth Bishop, Paul Celan, William Carlos Williams. Look, at every stage in my writing I have new influences, because I find that when I read someone whose work I really love—and this is poetry that rocks my world or crumbles my old ideas about writing—I start to try on their tricks. I am currently moved by Rachel Zucker, Robyn Schiff, Steve Gehrke, Carrie Fountain, Khaled Mattawa, Sabrina Orah Mark.

JW: I want to ask you about your creative process. What is it that inspires you to write a poem? How much of it is inspiration and how much is thinking about it afterwards?

MS: It's both. For me, writing is like praying or communicating with your spouse or child: You do it every day, and usually it has its own rewards. But you do it even when you don't feel like it, or feel inspired. Because the daily discipline and practice prepare you for the moments of inspiration. I try to journal for about 30 minutes a day, no matter what. Also, I carry a notebook with me everywhere I go. A few times every week, I set aside time whether I "have" it or not: a morning, an evening, a whole day to work on a poem or two in a concentrated manner. This is also when I research, if it's a poem that needs research, and most do.

It's important to have good tools—etymological dictionaries, field-guides of local birds, cookbooks, city maps, whatever it is you're writing about. I always have a few projects going on at once, because when you think something is done, it usually isn't quite done yet. I've just completed a poem that I'd been working on in parts for about five years, except I didn't know that the parts belonged together until recently. I'd done all this research but it was dead and dry. Then I had a conversation with a friend about something else entirely, and a random sentence animated the entire five-page poem.

JW: From looking at your biography and your poetry, I get a sense that

you're from everywhere and from nowhere. Your home is wherever you happen to be at the moment, and your life is whatever you're working on, whether it's academic research, teaching, or writing poetry. Can you say a little about how this lifestyle has influenced you as a poet?

MS: It's hard to say whether the lifestyle has influenced me as a poet, or the poetry has influenced my lifestyle.

The most obvious influence is language. In learning the languages of the places I've lived, I've been able to read literature in its original language, and so I've been exposed to work that hasn't been translated. And each language is a new system of thought.

In traveling, I noticed there are things that are familiar to all cultures and all societies; they're just expressed in different ways. So I like to work with a particular theme while drawing from many different cultures that are grappling with the same questions. Maybe that makes my work more prone to associative logic rather than straight narrative because I'm trying to make a leap, to show connections between people, places and concepts that don't necessarily jump out at you.

JW: What languages do you speak?

MS: Growing up, I heard as much Spanish and Czech as English, and I studied all three at university. Later I lived in Mexico and worked in Venezuela for a Sephardic foundation; I worked in the Czech Republic in a bilingual Czech-German school teaching Spanish; I studied philosophy in Germany. I also studied Yiddish. I'm the only one who knows what I'm saying when I speak French. I can pray in Hebrew, but that doesn't really prepare you for Modern Hebrew, which I'm studying now at *ulpan*.

JW: Your two poetry collections came out fairly recently. What made you decide to publish your poetry only now?

MS: That's when I found publishers. For the last ten years I've been

doing three kinds of writing simultaneously: translation, poetry, and academic writing. Because I was doing them all at the same time, publication took a little longer for each of them. They all started getting accepted for publication at about the same time. But I will say that it takes a very long time for poetry to get published. Most people that I've talked to submit a manuscript to every national competition or open reading period for at least five years before it gets picked up by a publisher. Poetry is mostly published in competitions. *Immigrant* was a finalist in four national competitions in America before it finally got accepted. And the chapbook was a finalist in two. Of course once you're an established poet it's easier, but to get a first and even a second book out is quite difficult.

JW: One of my favorite poems in "Immigrant" was *An Olive, A Letter*. This one feels the most "historical" to me.

MS: When I was a freelance writer, I started work on the 500-year history of the Sephardic Jews of the Caribbean and it gave me access to inquisition records. For purposes of expediency, we could only follow the male line, but most of the records were the trials of women, since, with the abolition of public expressions of Judaism, most of the rituals that remained were private—the Shabbat meal, lighting candles, laws of kashrut, Pesach cleaning. *Conversa* women were easier to convict than men in Portugal and Spain in the 17th and 16th centuries, and most were betrayed by their domestic help. Genevre Fonseca was actually one of the women from the families I was researching. I took her story and combined it with what I had read about a rash of Portuguese messianic movements begun by pre-adolescent and early adolescent girls. I was struck by how the girls tried to transcend the very constricted world in which they found themselves. These girls were thinking about the coming of the messiah, and it took the form of saying, "we don't have to do housework anymore, we can wear pretty clothes, we can eat good food, we can play music and relax." Genevre Fonseca was burned at the stake. She was married to a surgeon, and she was very young, about 16. She conspicuously tried to convince people that she wasn't Jewish. She would sit in front of a window on

Shabbat and she'd spin.

JW: But it didn't help.

MS: No.

JW: I also really liked the poem *Blemish*. I see that it was originally called *Platitudes at Sea*. Why did you change the name?

MS: I didn't think *Platitudes at Sea* was working very well—because the term "platitudes" removes the focus from the singular experience of loss in the poem. As for the title *Blemish*, it emphasizes the difficulty we have with renunciation, letting go of desire. It's a very mystical idea. If you can get rid of your desire...the ego is a big problem. It's the ego that desires things. Maybe the poem expresses the attempt at renouncing your ego with the hope of joining into the horizon. But that hurts, and we don't want to do that. We all like our own blemishes.

JW: After many years of traveling and writing poetry and experiencing other places you have become the mother of a young child. Has that affected the tension one senses in your poems between rootlessness and belonging?

MS: *Aliyah* has probably heightened these tensions more. But having a child affected my writing in a way that I wasn't expecting. I'm a single mother, so my daughter and I have a very close relationship—and, of course, I've traveled a lot with her. So for about two years after she was born I didn't allow myself to feel certain things, because I wanted to have a steady mood for her. It took me a while to re-orient myself as a writer in motherhood. I was afraid at first that I wouldn't be able to write again. It hasn't necessarily changed the themes or ideas that I write about. But motherhood has made me a much more patient person, and it's made me more aware of social connections and community. It's made me more sleep-deprived, and sometimes that gives one new insights.

JW: You mentioned your recent *aliyah* to Israel. How did that decision come about?

MS: After my dissertation I was lucky enough to be offered a tenure track position at the American University in Washington. On the winter break of my first year, I took a month off and came to Israel with the intention of just relaxing. And then I met Ellen Spolsky. She told me about the program, and asked me to apply as a visiting poetry instructor. And I came with my one-year-old daughter, and I loved it. I would write home, "I'm working very hard, I'm not making any money, I hardly know anyone, but I'm really happy." When I was offered the position of Director of the Creative Writing program it seemed like such a wonderful opportunity. Personal circumstances were such that it seemed right for me to come here.

JW: And now that the move is behind you, how are you managing?

MS: I love my job. It's good to work with students who are open to learning and yet have such rich and varied life experiences. My colleagues are fun, smart, helpful. I need to work on my Hebrew so I can distinguish junk mail from bills, and get to know a broader range of Israeli society. But I think I made a good decision. Even though I swear there are fewer hours in an Israeli day than in other kinds of days, because I can never catch up on all I need to do.

JW: Can you talk a little about the way you read the work of other poets?

MS: Well, it depends on what I'm reading. But in general, I try to see how the poem is put together, and how the structure of the poem gives information. I take that approach in class as well. I want students to look at *how* the poem means, and not necessarily *what* it means. Once you figure out how it means, how it creates its worlds and its truths, then most of the time you get what it means as well. Obviously different poems appeal to different aesthetics.

JW: Do you think that prose writers should study poetry as well? What can prose writers learn from studying poetry?

MS: I've had many prose writers take poetry workshops and poetry translation classes, and all of them have said that it's very helpful. Sometimes students of fiction gain an appreciation for the concept of word choice, because poetry is much more selective—it has to be, since most poems are shorter than most fiction. Students gain an appreciation for different kinds of narrative constructs. Poetry often works by connotation rather than denotation, word placement—how words work together. Also, poetry must create its own music and its own form each time, and this is useful to learn. One of the quotes I like to go into class with is from William Carlos Williams, *It's difficult to get the news from poems, but men die every day from lack of what is found there*. Poetry really does deal with the most personal and the most universal themes in a very short and concentrated space.

JW: What advice can you offer poets who are trying to combine writing poetry and making a living?

MS: You don't make money from poetry, even when you're a successful poet.

JW: Let me put it this way: given that you're going to have to work to earn a living, how do you structure your life so that you're able to be in a place where you can write poetry?

MS: Well, that depends on you. I found that when I was a freelancer it was very hard for me to write poetry because my mind was being used for such similar work. Of course after I quit, I realized it had given me a lot of material, but at the time it was very difficult to do both. Many people enjoy the combination of poetry and manual labor. I have friends that are carpenters, gardeners—wine making seems to be a popular profession. I wouldn't mind doing that myself, except I wouldn't want to quit my current job. The main thing is setting aside time to write, making sure that you have the mental space, and the

mental energy. You have to stay in touch with whatever it is that feeds the poetry.

JW: What is most important in teaching poetry? What things are most important for you to convey to your students?

MS: My goal is to give people the tools they need to read and love poetry. Many people don't have a daily familiarity with poetry, and their only experience of it is being forced to memorize it or "analyze" it in high school. So it's a dreaded subject sometimes. Sometimes people are trained to read poetry as autobiography, or as a puzzle or set of symbols to be translated into prose. But that's missing the point. When I teach, I try to show my students a wide range of poetry, and we look at different strategies for how to read. We look at rhyme, at meter; we look at different genres of poetry and try to understand what they're for. Some poems work almost completely on structural elements alone, and once you understand the construction of a poem, that's the joy. You can't teach somebody to like something, but you can teach them how to appreciate it by giving them the tools that they need to understand how it works. One of the things I love most about teaching poetry is the "conversion experience" of people who are taking poetry classes because they have to. That moment in the semester when they stop and say, "Hey, I really like this!" That's what I live for, as a teacher.

Contributors' Notes

Joanna Chen was born in the U.K. and is a first-year student in the Creative Writing Program at Bar-Ilan University. She works at *Newsweek's* Middle East Bureau, covering news from Israel. Joanna has also published world reports on the subject of women's issues in *Marie Claire* and has contributed to the *BBC World Service's Women's Hour*, *The Food Programme*, *World Have Your Say* and *Outlook*.

Michael Collier is the author of five books of poems, including *Dark Wild Realm* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006). In 2009, he received an Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He teaches in the creative writing program at the University of Maryland and is director of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference.

Deborah Danan came to Israel from London in 2002 and received her BA in English from the Hebrew University. Deborah had never intended to be a writer but took up travel writing while backpacking in the sub-continent. Her blogs were well received and as a result Deborah enrolled in the Shaindy Rudoff Creative Writing Program at Bar-Ilan. Deborah is currently in her second year in the master's program as well as working as the editor of the *Jerusalem Post's* Premium content.

Ira Director - A Chicago-born poet and artist, Ira Director earned a BA in philosophy in the United States and an MA in Creative Writing from the Shaindy Rudoff Program at Bar-Ilan University. While still a master's student, Mr. Director initiated *Poetry from Bar-Ilan*, a program providing venues where Bar-Ilan's poets can present their work to the public. In addition to his poetry appearing in numerous exhibitions as integral components of paintings, they have been published in Israeli and other journals.

Miriam Green is a 19-year resident of Beer Sheva, Israel, and a mother of three sabras. She holds a BA English Literature from Oberlin

College, and is in her second year of Bar-Ilan's Shaindy Rudoff Graduate Program in Creative Writing.

Dan Gutstein works at Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, Md., and teaches at both George Washington University and the Writer's Center—both in the Washington, D.C. area. *Jerusalem* appears in his collection, *non/fiction*, which appeared from Edge Books in 2010. His writing has been published in more than 65 journals and anthologies, including *Best American Poetry*.

Annael Jonas is a first year student in the fiction track of the Shaindy Rudoff Graduate Program in Creative Writing. She enjoys acting, singing, thinking about literature and occasionally even writing. Or in other words: Jack of all Blakes, master of Donne.

Jillian Jones - A native Californian, Jillian Jones moved to Israel in 2010 to study poetry at Bar-Ilan University, where she is currently pursuing an M.A. in creative writing. Jillian worked previously as a newspaper reporter in the Napa Valley, and earned her B.A. in English Literature from the University of California, Berkeley. She has studied with such distinguished poets as Marcela Sulak, Robert Hass, Lyn Hejinian and Mark McMorris. Sonnets make Jillian cry.

Judy Labensohn graduated from Bar-Ilan with an MA in fiction in 2006. She earned her MFA in creative nonfiction at Goucher College in 2001. She teaches writing at David Yellin College in Jerusalem, as well as privately at home in Moshav Beit Zayit. Her writing has appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Creative Nonfiction*, and *Natural Bridge* among others and has been anthologized. For a complete list of publications, see www.WriteInIsrael.com. Labensohn is from Shaker Heights, Ohio and came to Israel in 1967. Since 2007 she has served as coordinator of the Shaindy Rudoff Graduate Program in Creative Writing.

Joan Leegant is the author of *Wherever You Go*, published July 2010, and *An Hour in Paradise*, for which she won the PEN/New England

Book Award, the Wallant Award for Jewish Fiction, and was a Finalist in the National Jewish Book Award. Formerly an attorney, she taught at Harvard University for eight years. From 2007 to 2010 she was the visiting writer at Bar-Ilan University. When not teaching in Israel she lives in Newton, Massachusetts. For more about Joan Leegant and her work, visit www.joanleegant.com.

Sherri Mandell won a National Jewish Book Award for her spiritual memoir, *The Blessing of a Broken Heart*. Translated into three languages, the book was adapted into a stage play which opened at the San Diego Repertory Company. In December 2010 she won first prize in *Moment Magazine's* Karma Short Fiction Prize for a story she began in a Bar-Ilan Summer Workshop taught by Ehud Havazelet. She studied poetry at Colorado State University where she received an MA in Creative Writing. She made aliyah in 1996 and lives in Tekoa with her husband and children. She directs the *Koby Mandell Foundation* programs for bereaved women.

Karen Marron lives in Tel Aviv, where she works as an editor and science writer. She received her MA in Creative Writing from Bar-Ilan University in 2008. Her fiction has been published in *Small Spiral Notebook*, in *Beeswax Magazine* and in the anthology *Israel Short Stories*.

E. Ethelbert Miller is a literary activist. He was born in 1950 and grew up in the South Bronx. Today he is the board chair of the Institute for Policy Studies, a progressive think tank located in Washington, D.C. Mr. Miller is also the director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University. The author of several collections of poetry, he has also written two memoirs. Mr. Miller has taught at UNLV, American University, George Mason University, and Emory and Henry College. For several years he was a core faculty member with the Bennington Writing Seminars.

Mark Jay Mirsky founded *Fiction* in 1972 with Donald Barthelme. His third novel, *Blue Hill Avenue*, was recently listed with work of Melville,

Thoreau and Henry James as “essential” New England reading. Co-editor of the *The Jews of Pinsk (translation)*, a professor at The City College of New York, his thirteen published books include the novels, *Thou Worm Jacob*, *Blue Hill Avenue*, *The Secret Table*, *The Red Adam*; the essays in *My Search for the Messiah*, *The Absent Shakespeare*, and *Dante, Eros and Kabbalah*. Forthcoming in 2011 is *A Satire to Decay*, *Deciphering the Drama in Shakespeare’s Sonnets*.

Andrea Moriah is a first-year student in the Shaindy Rudoff Graduate Program in Creative Writing at Bar-Ilan. She was born and raised in the great Midwest of the United States and now lives in the rolling hills outside of Jerusalem. *The Heron* received an Honorable Mention in the *Voices Israel Poetry* contest.

Jonathan Papernick is the author of *The Ascent of Eli Israel* and *Who by Fire, Who by Blood* and his recently published collection of short stories *There is No Other*. He has been selling his books via pushcart at farmers markets in New England and New York as Papernick the Book Peddler. Papernick teaches fiction writing at Emerson College and the BIMA program at Brandeis University. To learn more, please visit www.jonpapernick.com.

Gerald Stern was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1925 and was educated at the University of Pittsburgh and Columbia University. He is the author of 15 books of poetry, including, most recently, *Save the Last Dance* (Norton, 2008) and *Everything is Burning* (Norton, 2005), as well as *This Time: New and Selected Poems*, which won the 1998 National Book Award. The paperback of his personal essays titled *What I Can’t Bear Losing* was published in the fall of 2009 by Trinity University Press. He was awarded the 2005 Wallace Stevens Award by the Academy of American Poets and is currently a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. He is retired from the University of Iowa Writers’ Workshop. *Early Collected: Poems from 1965-1992* was published by W. W. Norton in the spring of 2010.

Marcela Sulak is the author of two poetry collections and has translated three book-length poetry collections from the Czech Republic and Congo-Zaire. She directs the Shaindy Rudoff Graduate Program in Creative Writing at Bar-Ilan University.

H. William Taesch is a second-year student in the Shaindy Rudoff Creative Writing Program at Bar-Ilan University. Over the past few years he has published seven short stories, some included in a self-published book, *Learning the Game*. At present he is finishing a novel, *Emergent Occasions*, about an HIV-positive mother, her premature baby, and the drug addicted doctor who tries to save them.

Yaer Talkar was born in Bombay, India and made Aliyah in 1987. He resides in Rishon Lezion with his wife and their three children. He is completing an MA in Creative Writing from Bar-Ilan University.

Yael Unterman's first book, *Nehama Leibowitz: Teacher and Bible Scholar*, was a finalist in the 2009 National Jewish Book Awards. Her second book, a collection of short stories (many written while in the Shaindy Rudoff Creative Writing Program) is due to be published by Yaldah Publishing in 2012.

Galina Vromen, a second-year student at Bar-Ilan University's Creative Writing Program, is the executive director of *Keren Grinspoon Israel* and of its *Sifriyat Pijama* program, one of Israel's largest pre-literacy programs, serving 44,000 preschool children and their families. She was previously an international journalist for Reuters News Agency and a translator and copyeditor at *Ha'aretz English Edition*.

Janice Weizman graduated from the Shaindy Rudoff Creative Writing program at Bar-Ilan University in 2007. In 2009 she founded the program's literary journal, *Ilanot*, the former incarnation of *The Ilanot Review*. Janice's work has appeared in *Scribblers on the Roof* and *Jewish Fiction*. Her historical novel, *The Wayward Moon*, will be published with Yaldah Publishing in 2012.