

שמרץ

GOULDMAN



** Dedicated to Bubs and Zeyds, who passed away this year. I'll miss you forever. **

A NOTE ON MY USE OF GOY, GOYIM, AND CHRISTIAN:

When using these terms I'm not referring to individual people, or the tenets of Christianity itself, but a hegemonic system of power that is default cis, white, male, straight, and Anglo-Saxon, and the violence that has taken place in the name of Christianity. A system that forces people to assimilate as a means of survival and, to quote Adrienne Rich, causes anyone who is not the above identifiers to, "...change your name, your accent, your nose; straighten or dye your hair; stay in the closet; pretend the Pilgrims were your fathers; become baptized as a Christian... starve yourself to look young, thin, and feminine; don't gesture with your hands; value elite European culture above all others; laugh at jokes about your own people; don't make trouble; defer to white men; smile when they take your picture; be ashamed of who you are..." (qtd. in Kreiger 61).

A NOTE ON POSITIONALITY:

I identify as a cis, white, queer Jewish woman. The following stories come from my own imagination, which is to say they are limited in scope, filtered through my own experience of being cis, white, queer, Jewish, and female in this world, as well as my own interpretations and queerings of Jewish history and folklore. This collection is not meant to speak for all Ashkenazi Jews – many of whom are not white – not to mention Sephardic or Mizrahi Jews or Jewish converts. I expect, for instance, that some Jewish folks might disagree with the ways I've chosen to reclaim certain anti-Semitic tropes. But that's sort of the point – disagreement, healthy debate, multiple interpretations, discussions about reclamation – the same point that has always been at the heart of Judaism and Jewish culture.

That said, because of the diasporic nature of the Jewish people, I do draw on many folktales and storytelling tropes that have been retold and reiterated in all Jewish communities, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, and Sephardic alike.

A NOTE ON SOME VITAL SOURCES:

Shirley Kumove's collection of Yiddish sayings, *Words Like Arrows*, has been of great use to me throughout this project. Reading through it, I was able to get a sense of my ancestors' worldview – those who lived in the *shtetls* in the Pale of Settlement – one that is both hopeful and pessimistic, witty and frank, and sometimes crude. In this chapbook, almost all of the Yiddish sayings I have used come from Kumove's book.

Uriel Weinreich's *Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary* sat beside me like a dedicated friend throughout the writing of this chapbook. Because Yiddish is an endangered language, it was often difficult to find adequate translations online. Without this

dictionary, I would have had to rely mostly on Google Translate, which, as we all know, is *never* a good idea.

Considering this chapbook contains almost two hundred Yiddish words, I have included a glossary on page 39. All Yiddish words throughout the text, except for names and titles, are italicized.

6 - 11

evelilith

13 - 20

gaylem nation

22 - 38

blumeh's pleasure quest

39

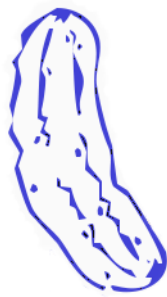
acknowledgements

40 - 42

glassary

43 - 44

references



צוויי פרויען מאכט ביז

EVELILITH

tsvey frayen makht keyz

*

It was Yom Kippur, when Yidn come together to atone for our sins, before the gates of Heaven close again and the Bukh of Life is sealed for another year.¹ But, while Eve was having an afternoon shluf, Lilith, the Malkeh of Demons, snuck into Gan Eden and whispered an incantation into her ear, suggesting she slip out of Gan Eden and meet Lilith on the beach that night...

*

On the shore of the Red Sea laid Lilith and Eve.² Stars pierced the black sky. The new moon was out like a curved tongue so searing hot it glowed white.³ Everything was a tongue: the red waves licking the shore, the sand like cat tongues upon their bare thighs, even the fish were tongues swimming through water. Both Lilith and Eve wet like a tongue.

“Adam told me not to come,” said Eve, curled up and laying on her side, facing Lilith.

“In more ways than one, I’m sure,” said Lilith, her wings spread wide against the sandy floor, her hands clasped behind her mess of long wiry hair. The owl feather tattoos circling her ankles stirred in the light breeze coming up from shore.

“He says you’re a snake.⁴ That I shouldn’t trust a word that comes out of your mouth.”

“You’d be smart not to trust the words, but you should certainly trust the mouth,” said Lilith. Eve pulled at the hem of her jean shorts, her cheeks blooming red.

“He says you’re the Princess of Screeching,⁵” said Eve.

“God, where’s this *ganev* getting all his info from? It’s *screaming*. Not screeching. I’m the Princess of Orgasmic Screaming.”

“*But*—he says that every time a woman sleeps with another woman, a hundred children die. I couldn’t bear it. I love kids.”

“*Nu*, isn’t it a hundred cats? And not sex but masturbation?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know, that old superstition that says if you masturbate, one hundred kittens die or

1 *Yidn* is Yiddish for ‘Jews’, pronounced “Yeed-n”.

2 In the Talmud, Lilith flees to the Red Sea to avoid having sex with Adam (Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* 210).

3 The new moon is when Lilith comes out and wreaks her seductive havoc on the world (Patai, *Gates to the Old City* 458).

4 Lilith is often characterized as a “Serpent... Woman of Harlotry, End of all Flesh, End of the Days,” (Patai, *Gates to the Old City* 460) and is blamed for seducing Eve into eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, leading not only to Adam and Eve being cast out of Heaven but to Eve birthing Cain, the evil son who killed his brother, Abel (Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* 210; Patai, *Gates to the Old City* 456).

5 On the Day of Atonement Lilith went about screeching through the desert with her legion of 480 demons-spirits, for she is the princess of screeching (Patai, *Gates to the Old City* 465).

something.”

“*Oy gevalt*, I must have killed at least a thousand kittens...”

“Don’t worry, baby, I’ve killed my fair share too,” Lilith winked, placing her hand on Eve’s thigh, her fingers edging under the fray of Eve’s jean shorts. Eve shuddered.

“Come closer,” said Lilith. “You can lay on my wings. It’ll be *hey mish*, I’ll keep you warm.”

“I can’t,” said Eve, but let Lilith’s hand remain. “It’s *Yom Kippur*.”

“Kipper, shmipper,” Lilith said.

“I should be at temple – atoning for my sins.”

“Atoning for your sins, eh? I mean, we can *still* do that...” said Lilith, running her hand up and down Eve’s thigh. The air was thick, the stars gleaming. The waves wet their toes with a glistening cold.

“I don’t even know how I let myself come here. But the moon was so bright, so, I dunno...”

“Hot?”

“Curved. I had to come to the beach to look at it.”

“Then look at it,” said Lilith.

The moon was between Lilith’s legs, it’s glow undulating redpurplegreen like the aurora borealis.⁶ Surrounding her moon was the same thick, golden fur of Lilith’s armpits.

“Whoa,” said Eve, shuddering again. “I never knew it could do that.”

“Oh, ‘it’ sure can,” said Lilith. “Did you ever wonder why the Tree of Knowledge in your garden is so damn pathetic?”

“Yeah, Adam must be *meshugeh* ‘cause he keeps on telling me not to eat the fruit. But there’s no fruit to speak of. He’s always spraying it with pesticide. It smells awful.”

“Well, you know how the saying goes: *der khazer shvert az er est nisht keyn drek*, the pig swears he doesn’t eat shit. The only fruit Adam owns is his *gorgl*.⁷”

“Shh, Lilith, what if God hears you?”

“What if I told you that this moon right here was The Fruit?”

“You mean, *thuh* fruit?”

“That’s right. Eat from this, darlin’, and you’ll be a whole new woman.”

“But how?”

“Oh, well you simply bend down and...”

“No, I mean how will I be a ‘new’ woman?”

“Sorry, got a little ahead of myself. Right-o: eat from this fruit and you will never have to listen to Adam again. When that *putz* tries to get you to darn his smelly socks or make him *kneydlech* soup or *shlep* his dirty underwear to the river, you’ll feel just fine giving him the fuck-you finger. I mean the *literal* fuck-you finger. The one you use to, you know, have fun with yo—”

“Okay, yes, I get it, move on, please.”

⁶ In the Zohar, Lilith seduces Eve through light (Patai, *Gates to the Old City* 455).

⁷ ‘Adam’s apple’.

“You will be fire walking. Born anew each day with an unbridled desire that you can *fulfill* with whomever and *whatever* you want. You can travel the world with me, drink wine in Italy and France, no more of that tired Manischewitz, dance flamenco in Granada with the Gitanos, piss in alleyways, eat shrimp in Bali, spin with the whirling dervishes, and at night, we’ll dive into the sea with a million lovers and drink each other’s salt.”

“I’ve always wanted to visit the South of France... and eat shellfish...”

“Oh, baby, you can – But only if you want to. And also, in the Spirit of Full Transparency – I have herpes.” For a moment, the sky folded in on itself like a bedsheet.

“Whoa! What was that?” asked Eve.

“Don’t worry about her, that’s just the Spirit of Full Transparency letting us know she’s arrived. So... Would you like to?” asked Lilith.

“Do you have protection?” asked Eve.

“Sure do,” said Lilith.

“Then *I* do,” said Eve, staring at Lilith and moving Lilith’s hand further up her shorts.

“Oh, *Eve*,” Lilith shuddered. She wrapped her left wing around Eve, pulling Eve close to her, and kissed her. Then, with soft *veykhkeyt*, she bit along Eve’s neck and ears.⁸

“Your lips taste like honey,” said Eve.⁹

“Let me taste yours,” said Lilith, sliding her wings down Eve’s body, her head stopping at Eve’s southern tip, and then unbuttoning her shorts.

“Your wings,” said Eve. “They feel *guuud*.”

“They’re made of fingertips, and *meydeleh*, you feel great too.”

Lilith felt Eve with her nose, then licked her with her forked tongue.

“My Lord!” said Eve.

“Thank you, *Adoynoy*,¹⁰” said Lilith.

“I’ve never ever felt so alive!”

Lower-back arched, Eve’s hands dug into the sand, and the waves lapped at her heels. Lilith’s wings lightly flapped.

With both hands, Eve grabbed Lilith’s head, stopping her.

“Can I taste you?” Eve asked.

“Please,” said Lilith. “But one sec.” From a secret pocket in her wing, Lilith pulled out a dental dam. On the package, it said: “XXXtra Thin: So natural it’s supernatural. Vegan, Gluten-Free, and guaranteed *Treyf*.”

Lilith slithered up Eve’s body and handed the dental dam to Eve. Eve’s tongue became a compass leading her down to Lilith’s white-hot moon.

“*Fuck*, you’re a natural,” said Lilith.

“I feel like I’m eating the genesis of dates, peaches, pomegranate...” Eve said, reaching her hands up to Lilith’s hard nipples, and pinching them between her fingers.

“Good to know the package wasn’t falsely advertising... Oh, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph...”

8 *Veykhkeyt*, Yiddish for ‘Tenderness’.

9 Honey is said to flow from Lilith’s lips; she uses this sweetness to seduce people (Patai, *Gates to the Old City* 464).

10 One of the many Yiddish names for ‘God’.

"Now get back up here," said Lilith. "I wanna kiss you again."

Eve crawled up Lilith's fingertip feathers. Just as they kissed, Eve pressed herself against Lilith's electrified moon.

"Oh, *Lilith*, *Abitar*, *Abiqar*, *Amorpho*, *Hakash*, *Odam*, *Kephido*, *Ailo*, *Matrota*, *Abnukta*, *Shatriha*, *Kali*, *Taltui*, *Kitsha*¹¹—Oh! Divine light of my loins!"

Eve had become all beings at once: all muscle and flesh and bone, nail and teeth. All sun and chlorophyll and photosynthesis, bark and leaf, long knobby branches reaching into the sky, into clouds, into all of Eternity. Eve was *Etz Khayim* – The Tree of Knowledge. The wood that built Noah's Ark.

"Oh, Lilith, I—"

"Yeah, Eve—"

"I think I'm about to—"

"Me too, Eve, but—"

"Yes?"

"Do you mind slapping me on the tush quick?"

"Sure! Like a *potsh* or more of a *zets*?"

"A *zets*!"

"There?"

"Yes! There!"

"Or here?"

"There, there!"

"Okay," said Eve, slapping Lilith's left butt cheek hard.

"Oh, yes, Eve!"

"Oh, Lilith, I think I'm gonna—"

"Eve, I'm *definitely* gonna—"

They screamed so loud a new star appeared in the sky. They screamed so loud the tectonic plates beneath the Red Sea shifted. They screamed so loud the Red Sea came out of them. It was thick and sticky, smelling of iron and the sweet of sweat.¹²

They were exhausted.

"I've never seen such a bright shade of red," said Eve, panting. "What is it?"

"It's the sea and all of its sand and dirt and flora."

"Wow."

Eve laid her head on Lilith's shoulder and noticed a tattoo behind her ear.

"What happened there?" asked Eve.

"Oh, shit, you mean the scar?"

"I think so."

"It's nothing."

"Come on, *zog mir*."

"No."

¹¹ An ancient magical ritual that refers to the myth of Lilith, tells of Lilith's fourteen names (Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* 215).

¹² It's said that Lilith-as-Serpent had sex with Eve before Adam could. This refers to the blood-like liquid Lilith-Serpent ejaculates into Eve while having sex with her, which represents menstruation (Patai, *Gates to the Old City* 455).

“Please.”

“Fine,” said Lilith. “But it might freak you out.”

“Turns out I am a freak, so...”

“I was branded. By Adam.”

“Adam? But why? And *how*?”

“If you look close you can see what it says.”

O, *Flyer in a dark chamber, Go away at once, O Lili!*¹³

“I don’t understand,” said Eve, shaking her head.

“We were married once,” said Lilith. “Before you two.”

“Holy shit.”

“It was arranged by God. He said we were ‘*bashert*’.¹⁴ But I was young then and curious. Hell, I’m still curious. It should be my fifteenth name. Anyways. When Adam knocked me up, I said I didn’t want the baby. I wasn’t gonna be stuck inhaling the diaper fumes of the human race for the rest of my life. But he told me I was batshit crazy. So I, rather distastefully, told him to go to Hell.”

“Jesus Christ.”

“Yep, and then he branded me with my own banishment.”

“The *chutspeh*,” said Eve, nodding her head.

“Though soon he got all regretful and desperate. Sent three angels my way to convince me to come back.”

“Who were they?”

“Senoy, Sansenoy, and Semangel.¹⁵ But the joke’s on Adam. Little did he know that Senny, Sanse, and Sem had been doing abortion work on the side for *years*. They called it Natural Selection. So, badda-bing, badda-boom, a snip here and there, and I’m good as new. Single and ready to tingle.”

“I can’t believe Adam and God were lying to me this whole time! What a buncha *shmucks*! Here I was, thinking I was the First Woman, Adam’s one and only, and it was all a load of *drek*!”

“Men, am I right?”

“Men...” Eve said, shaking her head, staring at Lilith’s scar. She lifted her head and kissed it.

“Fuck ‘em,” Eve said, as her head took back its place on Lilith’s shoulder.

Eve and Lilith laid there, under the moon that had returned to the sky, under the star they’d given birth to, Eve wrapped up in Lilith’s wings until the red waves washed over their bodies and swallowed them.

¹³ A seventh-century B.C. tablet found in Northern Syria depicts Lilith with a tattoo of this phrase across her body (Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* 208).

¹⁴ ‘Soulmates’.

¹⁵ In a tale from the Talmudic period, God sends three angels, Senoy, Sansenoy and Semangel after Lilith, to convince her to return to Adam. Instead of returning, she makes a deal with the angels: anytime their names appear on an amulet she’ll stay away. She also agrees to the death of one hundred of her demon children everyday (Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* 210).

MEANWHILE, in a non-celestial dimension, in a land called Steel City, in a shtetl called Beygl Bergleh, something momentous was about to happen...



גוילעם לאנד

GOYLEM NATION

goylem land

*

A Retelling of Isaac Leib Peretz's Der Goylem

The Golem in English. A note on goylem stories: Jews summon the goylem in times of need. The goylem is a Frankenstein-like figure, most often a man made of clay. The goylem does exactly as it's told but to destructive excess. I.e. If the goylem is told to keep the fire burning, he'll let it burn until the entire house is aflame; if the goylem is told to fill the bathtub, he'll continue until he's flooded the bathroom. You get the point.

*

In a faraway land, guns did not exist...yet. But violence? Of course it did. I mean what are you, meshugeh? Did you think I was gonna tell you a story about fairy godmothers and unicorns and, of all things, peace? Feh! In the Jewish Quarter of Steel City, which the local Yidn called 'Beygl Bergleh', the gun was about to be invented, though the Yidn would call it something else...

*

There was a time, when great people could perform great miracles... This was not one of them.

Reb Avrameyleh Ben Yankl was no *lamed vovnik*, but he cared about his people a lot. And, thanks to his late mameh, he was *zeyer* a good cook and a talented engineer.

He was a man constantly plagued by *shpilkes* but with no place to put them – so he cooked, he dabbled, he puttered, he putzed. He *shvitzed*, he *klezmered*, he *klutzed*. And the *Toyreh*? Sure, *amol*, sometimes he studied. But despite his best efforts his brain *plotzed* whenever his eyes set upon a page of the *Alef-Beys*.¹⁶

The Rebbe was more of a *luftmentsh*: a dreamer who preferred the company of clouds to holy books.¹⁷ He admired the softness of clouds and their proclivity for changing shape.

¹⁶ The Yiddish and Hebrew alphabet.

¹⁷ *Luftmentsh* means "man of air" in Yiddish. Max Nordau, the author and Zionist leader, coined the term. He used it negatively – to refer to the statelessness of Jews. Without land, Jews were living on air. Only the procurement of land, i.e. Israel, could solve this (Philologos). I've heard two interpretations of how this term is used colloquially. One is that it's akin to having one's 'head in the clouds'. The other is that it's a person with no reliable means of income, a person who lives hand to mouth and thus essentially 'lives on air'. A similar term is a *luft gesheft* – a business of air. "What's your merchandise?" / "My merchandise is the air!" (Dolman).

Whereas books, bound with covers, demanded a focus too narrow for the Rebbe. Clouds were the perfect place for Yidn, a stateless people. They were much kinder than land. And cherubs? Not a territorial species. Ah, if we could live in the clouds, all these problems we wouldn't have...

It was his tateh, Reb Yankl, who had been the pious, *sheyner* Rebbe. But he'd never felt close to him. When his tateh was alive, he had treated the Rebbe in a cold, distant manner and so his mameh's kitchen and engineering workshop became his refuge.

What the Rebbe did have was his *kugl*, a savoury pudding made of *bulbes* and *lokshn*, potatoes and noodles. Yidn from all the not-so-far corners of Beygl Bergleh came to *nosh* on his *kugl*, and to charm him into giving them his recipe – which he did, often.¹⁸ He wasn't good at keeping secrets, even his own. People knew his weakness: wigs. The red ones were the best; they showed off his hazel eyes and brought out the auburn tones in his long black *peyos* and beard. It brought him *hanoe* to dance around in his wigs to Mickey Katz. 'That Pickle in the Window' was his favourite song – he found it quite erotic. His good friend, Blumeh, often joined him. She too found the song erotic. Lucky they were of a people lush in pickles...

Pogroms had erupted in Steel City. It was a time of *tsuris*: gentrification, the housing crisis, outrageous school debt, a dwindling job market, the outsourcing of factory work, right-wing leaders voted into power, police brutality, the climate crisis – all of these things were causing great conflict among the citizens of Steel City. And, as it goes, Black and Indigenous people, immigrants and refugees, folks of color, queer and trans people, and the Yidn of Beygl Bergleh, who were themselves an *erev rov*, a mixed multitude, became the targets of such violence – often at the hands of skinheads, whose leader, Fred, had become mayor. Drunk on power, the skinheads raped, beat, vandalized, torched, and stole with impunity.

The Yidn of Beygl Bergleh went to Reb Avreymeleh Ben Yankl and said: "Rebbe! The skinheads are burning down our *yeshivehs* and *shuln*, desecrating the mosques and Hindu temples, beating up queer people, and folks of color, throwing bricks through our windows, murdering us with bats, knives, and cargo vans! For fuck's sake, get off your *tukhes* and do something!"

The Rebbe knew it was time to listen to the words of his tateh. He must get his head out of the clouds and his feet back on soil. So, he went into his workshop, determined to invent something to protect the Yidn.

There, in the middle of his workshop, stood a large pile of scrap metal he'd collected over the years. With his *Toyreh* in hand, and a batch of his inspired *kugl* in the other (along with some snacks, a *knish* or two, a jar of pickles, mustard, a *bisl khreydn*, a loaf of rye, a bag of chocolate *rugelach*, and, why not, a two-six of *shnaps*)¹⁹ Reb Avreymeleh Ben Yankl began to, well, do something.

After seven long days and seven even longer nights, the Rebbe, eyes bloodshot, *peyos*

¹⁸ As Samin Nosrat says, "It's all about layering the fat."

¹⁹ *Az der mogn iz leydik iz der moyekh oykh leydik*; when the stomach is empty so is the brain. Who could argue with that?

limp with grease, his *punim* and beard a collage of *schmutz*, emerged from his workshop and called a town meeting. Within his hands, he held something he called, “The goylem”.

THE REBBE: *Nu*, so whaddyas think?

YIDN: *Nu*, what should we think?

THE REBBE: No, but like, seriously.

YIDN: Who’s saying we’re not serious?

The goylem was compact yet sleek, small yet muscled. It rested snug in the Rebbe’s palm as he raised it into the *himl* for all to see. The Yidn beheld it from every angle as the Rebbe twirled his hand left, then right, the sunlight a slug slipping along its hard, shiny body. With pressure from his index finger, the goylem chirped, “Pew! Pew!” spitting out what seemed like hundreds of sharp grey pellets.

Some Yidn were enchanted by it, others, feh, not so much.

SHLOYME: For this, you worked an entire week?

THE REBBE: I mean...

SHLOYME: You can’t empty the ocean with a spoon!

THE REBBE: It isn’t a spoon.

SHLOYME: I know, Reb, it’s a metaphor.

THE REBBE: It’s not a metaphor either.

SHLOYME: Yes, I *know*. I was referring to what I said befo –

Having stumbled into the realm of gobbledygook, the voice of Shloyme’s *bubbeh*, Golde, flew into his head: *Yingleh, az a kluger ret tsu a nar redn tsvey naronim*, Kid, when a wise man talks to a fool, two fools are talkin’.

SHLOYME: Oh, nevermind.

THE REBBE: It’s–

RIVKE: A metal bird? How’s that gonna save us?

THE REBBE: No, it’s not–

PINKHAS: Is that its *tukhes* or its mouth? Is it *kaking* or spitting?

MENDL: So you want we should feed it? I vote Rukhl’s brisket!

RUKHL: *Sha*, Mendl! No more comments from the peanut gallery.

MENDL: What? A particular talent it takes to turn a brisket grey...

THE REBBE: Please, if I could just–

BLUMEH: Is it a magical dildo?

GITL: You’re always wishing for magical dildos, Blumeh.

BLUMEH: What can I say? Sometimes pickles don’t do the trick...

THE REBBE: My god, *genug shoyn!* Enough *khokhmenen* already!²⁰ I know the linguist Deborah Tannen calls this ‘high-involvement cooperative overlapping’ but can you all just listen to me for one friggin’ moment?!

SHLOYME: Who said we’re not listening?

RIVKE: Tannen? I never heard it before... sounds *goyish* to me...

MENDL: She has what to say?

²⁰ *Khokhme* in Yiddish means “wisdom”, however it can also mean a “joke” – a glimpse into the irreverence built into the language... *khokhmenen zikh* means “to joke” or “to fool around” (Dolman).

THE REBBE: Oy, it's hopeless. Not even Moses could get along with Yidn...

BLUMEH: I hope it's a magical dildo...

GITL: For your sake, Blumeh, me too.

BLUMEH: For *all* our sakes, Gitl.

THE REBBE: OY! *SHVAYGT!* THIS IS NOT A BIRD OR A DILDO—

BLUMEH: A *magical* dildo—

THE REBBE: Yes, Blumeh, we get it. Magic or not, IT'S NOT A DILDO. BEHOLD! THIS, HERE, IS A WEAPON. Now, listen up! Never before has a weapon this deadly existed. With it, we shall kill our enemies instantly – they'll drop like flies! It might not look like it, but this small object, it's our Messiah! The whole *shmeer!*

GITL: I dunno, Rebbe. Sounds dangerous.

SHLOYME: That's the point, Gitl – danger.

THE REBBE: Exactly, Shloyme! The goylem will make everyone fear us. No one'll ever mess with Yidn again!

SHLOYME: But what about the good *goyim*? Bob, Russ, Betty... there's a lot of good gentiles out there.

THE REBBE: It'll protect them too!

Problem was – it didn't. There was a glitch.

The first to die was the mayor, Fred, leader of the skinheads.

Every night after work, Fred drank with his cronies in a beer hall on Steel Road. The Rebbe's cousin, Saul, who bartended there, said Fred always left through the backdoor to avoid the press. The Rebbe wrapped the goylem in a *shmatteh*, hid it in his long thick beard, ascended the stairs of his workshop, and headed to the beer hall.

The Rebbe was shaking. He'd never killed anyone before. But desperate times called for desperate measures, or at least that's what people said, right? You had to be hard like metal, not soft like clouds. His tateh had been cold impenetrable steel.

In the back alley, he managed to find an empty milk crate to sit on and wait. *Surprisingly comfortable*, he thought. To calm himself down, he fished out a joint from his pocket that Blumeh had gifted him. By the time Fred stumbled out the backdoor, the Rebbe was baked as a *beygl* and chewing on one too, a leftover from breakfast he'd found in his other pocket.

Fred resembled a *khazer*, a pig in a pair of suspenders, his feet like hooves in little black dress shoes. And he was so drunk he hadn't noticed the Rebbe. He began lighting a cigarette with his back to the Rebbe. The Rebbe extricated the goylem from his beard, removed the *shmatteh*, snuck up behind Fred, and lifted it an inch from Fred's bald pink head. He felt he was going to faint. He'd sweat through his *tallis koten*, his mouth dry as a macaroon. But when Fred turned around so that the barrel was aimed smack-dab between his eyebrows, The Rebbe's brain went limp, as if turning into a bowl of borscht. His soul also relocated from his heart to a place of minimal feeling, the loose skin of his left elbow perhaps.

Each thing that happened next, the Rebbe watched but had no power to stop – he was

trapped within his own body, like being caught in sleep paralysis or an open-eyed coma. He had access to only about five percent of his vision, and watched all of his preceding actions through a pinhole.

He saw Fred's eyes grow wide and fearful. Felt his finger pull the trigger without hesitation. Watched the thread of blood seep out from the hole in Fred's forehead before his big body hit the floor, the dust rising like gnats. Looked down and saw his feet running back to the *shul*, and his hands hide the golem beneath a floorboard. His body then got itself into bed and closed its eyes, cutting-off his vision. While the Reb – or at least the consciousness that *was* him – remained trapped in a dark, foggy place like *Sheol*, the deep pit of forgetting where the dead went.

When the Reb woke up the next morning, he'd returned to his body. The golem was a terrible mistake, he knew this. So he jumped out of bed, set on destroying it. But when he lifted up the floorboard, the golem wasn't there.

See, the golem had a mind of its own – which was no mind. No mind at all. Just an endless hunger for death. In his workshop, the Reb had only tested out the golem on a dummy he'd stuffed with goose feathers. He'd also fashioned a fake heart for the dummy out of a balloon filled with Manischewitz, for bloody effect. Point is, he couldn't test the golem on a human.

The glitch: when intended for a human target, the golem suppressed the heart and mind of the one who held it. A person with empathy, with moral conscience, lost total control of their body once the golem fell into their hands. They became one thing only – a killer.

The golem decided.

The golem was master of men, and unfortunately, of women and enbies too.

It picked who would die next and who would do the killing, *not* the other way around.

And it did it innocuously. It would show up at a Yid's house, lying on the doormat, just asking to be held. And once their warm skin touched it's cold body, they were totally *farka-kt*.

In only a few days, the sky turned black and was besieged by a Biblical thunder. Everyday, the Rebbe tirelessly searched for the golem, but despite *makhing shnel* (the Yiddish version of 'hauling ass'), each tip he received came too late. The golem continued to evade him.

Yidn were staying in their houses to avoid the rivers of blood flowing through the streets. They told themselves the killings were necessary for their survival; they were done being scapegoats of the powerful. Still, *di mesire hot men lib; dem moyser hot men faynt*, one enjoys the report but despises the informant. And none could bear to stare such dirty work in the eye.

They locked their doors and shut their blinds and turned their radios and televisions on high...

Until it dawned on the Yidn that the golem was dividing its dirty work between them –

First to the Rebbe, then to Shloyme, then Rivke, then Pinkhas, and so on, until every Yid in Beygl Bergleh was implicated.

Within weeks, the golem, via Yiddish hands, had shot all the skinheads in Steel City.

Oy-yoy-yoy.

At least, with their enemies gone, the job was done. Over. Kaput.

So lucky? They weren't.

The golem presented itself again to the first Yid it had enlisted: the Reb.

Astonished, horrified, ashamed – the Rebbe had no idea what to do. Greys were sprouting in his beard and his red wigs had lost all their color. Or maybe it was because everything had turned red, everything stained with blood.

His mameh, Feygl, would never have made such a mistake. She'd always said, "Stick to your recipes, *bubeleh*." His *kugl* had brought happiness to the entire *kibbutz*. Maybe Blumeh was right about dildos. Joy brought people together. But this golem, it would tear them apart. Fear tore people apart.

This was his last chance: the golem, after eluding him for so long, had returned. Again, he set about destroying it. He tried sawing it in half. *Gornisht*. He wrapped it in dynamite and blew it up. No *pasó nada*. Not even a dent. He threw it in raging fire, thinking it would melt. Yeah, right. He boiled it. He beat it. He dropped a two-ton block of steel on it. As if. He buried it and it appeared on his bedside table that evening. Nothing worked. Maybe the golem was like a diamond, it could only be destroyed by another golem. But, feh, this would do nothing to solve the problem.

It was one thing when the golem had killed the mayor and his skinheads, but now? It was killing every *goy* in sight. Mendl shot a man in the middle of the Kemper Ave in broad daylight. Gitl shot her best friend as she walked out the door. Rukhl went into a pet store and killed even the dogs. The Rebbe abandoned all hope. *For their sake*, he thought, *I gotta convince my people that the goyim are bad. If Yidn must kill, I can at least make them feel not so bad about it.* Feeling he had no choice, he began creating enemies out of thin air.

During town meetings, he spread terrible lies of terrorism on the part of the *goyim*. He did such a great job that he began to believe himself, and, ironically, to sound more like a Man of The *Bukh*. As they say, *mit lign kumt men vayt ober nit tsurik*, You can go far with lies, but you cannot return. The Rebbe began to worship, not God, not even the clouds, but the golem.

THE REBBE: Yidn of Beygl Bergleh! We must be righteous and do what God has commanded us to do. We must slay the *goys* before we, ourselves, are slain and, alas, history repeats itself. If you believe in the doctrine of *tikken oylem*, repairing the world, go forth and do not falter – *kill*. And remember, the more you struggle in this life, the greater your reward in *oylem abbeh*. The world to come awaits you.

Soon, the golem had killed thousands. Others were displaced, pushed beyond the city limits. Until only Yidn remained.

But by now every Yid was a murderer. No one trusted each other. Imitation golems

began to proliferate, until each Yid had one hiding in their *heym* – under a pillow, in a dresser, in a flowerpot – or snuggled into the front of their waistband. Life was worth less than a damn *latke*. Without trust and only high levels of cortisol coursing through their bodies, Yidn lost the ability to think, to love, to converse, and even... to eat.

All of Steel City became de-facto Beygl Bergleh. But ‘Beygl Bergleh’ was too cutesy a name for the cold, grey, desolate place they lived, now shorn from any memory of what it used to be. It came to be known for what it was: Goylem Nation.

The last thing it needed was a founding myth, or lie, if you prefer. A story to assuage the masses and weaponize them against external threats.

All who had been present the morning Reb Avreymeleh Ben Yankl walked out of his workshop were long dead. No *yisher likht* – memorial candles – were lit for them. With them all knowledge that the goylem was manmade was lost. The Rebbe himself was also dead. No one knew who he’d been: a sweet, well-intentioned man with a brilliant mind but terrible follow-through. No one knew of his love of red wigs and Mickey Katz. And pickles. No one would ever taste his *kugl* again. History was a ruthless *mamzer ben hanide* with selective memory and no regard for good food. In the absence of such witnesses, nation-building myth moved swiftly in, occupying, mercilessly, every inch of empty space... And so, on a stone tablet that sat at the very top of the little hill that used to be Beygl Bergleh, it was written:

THE BIRTH OF GOYLEM NATION

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN PEOPLE COULD PERFORM GREAT MIRACLES... THIS WAS ONE OF THEM.

THE GHETTO OF BEYGL BERGLEH WAS BEING ATTACKED. GENTILES WERE RAPING THE WOMEN, PILLAGING HOUSES, BURNING CHILDREN, AND SMITING MEN. THE JEWS RAN TO REB AVREYMELEH BEN YANKL, WHO WAS ON HIS SEVENTH DAY OF FASTING AND *TUKHES-DEEP* IN THE TALMUD, AND SAID: DO SOMETHING!

THIS WAS THE MOMENT THE REBBE HAD BEEN WAITING FOR. GOD HAD TOLD HIM, ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASSION, THAT HE WAS DESTINED TO PERFORM MIRACLES. LAST WEEK, AFTER THE REBBE HAD KNOCKED BACK HIS NINTH *L'CHAIM*, ADOYNOY HAD LEANED DOWN FROM HIS GREAT THRONE IN THE CLOUDS AND WHISPERED INTO HIS EAR. OH, REBBE, HOW ZEYER GREAT YOU ARE, AND HOW SPECIAL AND POTENT YOUR SEED, AND HOW GROYS YOUR *SHMEKL*, AND HOW SMART AND NOBLE YOUR LITTLE BRAIN, AND HOW MANLY YOUR STUBBY TOES, AND HOW STRONG YOUR FAT FISTS, AND SO ON...

SO, THE REBBE PUT DOWN THE TALMUD, *KHAPPED* ONE LAST *L'CHAIM* FROM A TINY FLASK HE STORED BENEATH HIS *YARMULKE*, AND WALKED UP TO A PILE OF CLAY SITTING JUST OUTSIDE THE *SHUL*. HE LEANED DOWN, WITH THE SLOW AND STEADY GRACE HE WAS RENOWNED FOR, AND WHISPERED ONE OF THE SECRET NAMES OF ADOYNOY. AND FROM THIS FAITHFUL AND MIGHTY ACT, THE PILE OF CLAY TRANSFORMED INTO THE VERY FIRST GOYLEM, THEREBY INAUGURATING GOYLEM NATION, A NATION OF GOYLEMS, AND A HOME AT LAST FOR US, THE JEWS.

*

Nu. What did I tell you? Such is the way of power, as we all know. It disguises
itself as freedom, turns cuffs into guns, metal bars into borders.

Yet it all melts down to the same thing: fear. Hungry
mindless fear. Yes, the powerful shuffle our fears
and present them anew ale teg, everyday.

May Yidn, and all people, be possessed
by the rebellious spirit of Lilith
and be led always to doors

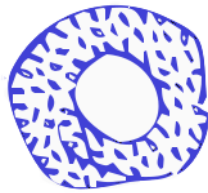
instead of gates

solidarity

instead

of

fear.



בלומעס האנה זוכן

BLUMEN'S PLEASURE QUEST

blumeh's hanah zuchn

*

Blumeh was on her way to *shul*, when she got a text. It was from Gitl Katz, asking Blumeh to fuck her in her red minivan. Gitl had parked it in the alleyway, the one behind *shul* that always smelled of chlorine from the *mikveh*. It was risky to fool around in the neighbourhood – Beygl Bergleh was a *shtetl* within Steel City, word spread fast – but Blumeh knew Gitl got off on that. They'd been doing this kind of thing for about six months now.

“Motke’s like the Queen of England, he never wants to touch me,” she said when Blumeh opened the van’s back door. “But *only* a corpse is done with sex.”

So Blumeh, amongst the kid’s toys and dried-up apple cores, the empty coffee cups and kosher wrappers, gladly obliged. Gitl Katz was a *yidene mit an oyring*, a woman in her late thirties with six kids, whose wrists and earlobes heaved with gold, whose *frum* wig was always tilted, but *oy*, could she slay Blumeh’s heart with a single look from her big brown eyes.

As Blumeh was crawling up Gitl after going down on her, Gitl slid her hands underneath Blumeh’s shirt, running them along her breasts. Blumeh jumped back, hitting her head against the rear-view mirror.

“Don’t do that,” said Blumeh. “You know I don’t like that.”

Blumeh never let lovers touch her. She feared slipping into some sort of gender-horror tv show, where a voice not her own – high-pitched, squeaky, helpless – would escape her body and she wouldn’t be able to take it back. That or a deep animal groan would slip out of her, her nostrils flaring, and her breasts billowing into mountains. She didn’t want lovers to see her vulnerabilities, only to see her as – well – capable. That’s the word that came to mind. So she always remained clothed. The only person with whom she’d ever been fully naked was Hankeh, her first love.

“Why don’t you ever let me touch you?” asked Gitl.

“Because I’d rather touch *you*,” said Blumeh.

“Can’t you be honest with me?” asked Gitl.

“I am being honest with you.”

“Fine,” said Gitl. “I’ll see you in *shul* then.”

“Oh,” said Blumeh, “Alright. I’ll walk around the block before I come in.”

Gitl shrugged.

Blumeh turned around and began walking down the alleyway. It felt like an ending. She’d had fun sneaking around with Gitl. Then again, it had gotten to that point. The point it always got to, when her refusal to let a lover touch her became a problem, her lover deeming himself the solver of that problem. Which in turn made Blumeh feel like a problem. By

now, she'd resigned herself to these endings.

She wished her best friend, Reb Avreymaleh Ben Yankl, who she called 'Yank', was free to smoke cigarettes and drink *mashkeh* with her on the shul's roof, but he was busy inventing something in his workshop.

Since Hankeh, Blumeh had had many lovers. She yearned for sex, craved the feeling of another's hot skin against hers, took pleasure in the sounds she elicited from a lover's body. But she could never cum. It had been that way since puberty, even with Hankeh. Seconds before climax, a flash of disgust would strike her and she'd steal away, retreating from her pleasure to a place of total numbness.

Cumming was so special before it had a name, a feeling that could be whatever it wanted. When she discovered its name – 'orgasm' – it lost its fluidity. The naming felt proscriptive. As did the words 'woman', 'gay', and 'Yid'. These words. She wanted to love them despite relating to them like a blind sketch of a picture.

Before puberty lust had been a thick, amorphous cloud that passed over her body. She had only to submit to it to yield pleasure. But as she got older, submission became different, loaded. A loss.

The grey sky threatened to pour down any second, though no one in the alleyway seemed concerned. About ten meters ahead of her, a teenage girl on a skateboard was practicing her ollies. A group of *yinglekh* ran past her. They were chasing after each other, *peyos* swinging wildly from their speed. She spotted her ten-year-old cousin, Fayvish, among them. With a stab of jealousy she remembered that prepubescent age, free of worry, when all that mattered was the present moment. Then again, they weren't free. *Politsyantn* regularly patrolled Beygl Bergleh. Liked to taunt the boys by pulling on their *peyos*, and snatching *yarmulkes* off their heads.

Clouds of dust floated up from a backyard, where someone was sawing through a piece of wood. As the sound of the electric saw vibrated against the walls of her cranium, a deep angst bubbled up inside her like bile. In a large window with a black sheet taped to its inside, she saw her reflection. The way her body rounded out her clothing, even the butchest pieces, always shocked her. *Oy*, how she yearned for a sharp, clean line. But her body would not allow it.

Every morning, Blumeh felt like she was trying to stuff her breasts, hips, and belly back into her body, to fold them back into herself like useless limbs. So she bound her breasts. Over her white-ribbed tank tops, she wore unbuttoned short-sleeved dress shirts to even out her curves. Her pleated dress pants she fastened around her waist with her late *zeydeh's* tan leather belt. Everyday, she wore her *zeydeh's* Star of David necklace as a good luck charm, tucking the large, tacky gold star underneath her shirt. But still, her wide *Yiddishe* hips spited her, bumping into corners everywhere she went. And at night she dreamt about a different body – a body without breasts, with wide shoulders instead of hips, a body you could slide a shirt down without friction...

She'd never known how to reconcile her transness with her *Yiddishness*. On one hand, she wanted to reclaim the stereotype of the buxom, sharp-tongued *Yiddishe* woman, whose body took up entire rooms. Wanted to take the stereotype of the *Yiddish* man, that

sickly, effeminate, bookish *nebekhl*, to the extreme. Wanted to summon all of the discarded bone matter shaved off of Yiddish women's noses and sculpt them into a towering, mammoth *shnoz*. Yiddishness oozed ugly femininity, one kind intimidating and overbearing, even monstrous, the other a perversion of an ideal 'maleness'. This ugliness attracted her, and repulsed her.

Maybe queerness was *exactly* that: ugly femininity.

Yet, she couldn't help but admit she wanted a piece of that ideal maleness, a piece of the quiet dignity and cool that came with being a *goy*; how such mystery was attributed to a *goyisher* man when he simply leaned against a wall. He could be thinking of nothing at all – or, even worse, he could be thinking about sports – and everyone around him would think he was a fucking genius. When the people around him were more likely geniuses because they were busy thinking about all the great things they imagined *he* was thinking about. That was the privilege of maleness. To be thinking of nothing at all while the world stood around you, staring, and worshipped you without question. While the world placed themselves below you without you having to even ask.

Blumeh was still walking down the alleyway, missing Hankeh's weirdly sexy feet, the smell of them like *khreyn* and *matzoh*, when she tripped on a skateboard flung into the middle of her path. The horrified face of the teenage girl flashed before Blumeh's eyes as her head hit against something. She felt the *crack!* in her *kishkehs*, and the puke rise up her throat before passing out.

Blumeh woke up in her studio apartment naked, staring into her full-length mirror. For a second, she didn't recognize herself. Saw what it might look like for a lover to wake up beside her, free of judgement. A face.

It was a nice face. Pleasant. Inviting, dark brown eyes. High cheek-bones. Fat cheeks. A thin sprinkle of black hairs on her upper lip. A distinctly 'Yiddish' nose – long, hooked, a little crooked. Thick eyebrows bordering on a unibrow. Full lips. A mole on her left cheek with a teensy hair growing out of it.

The last thing she remembered was falling and hitting her head – how'd she end up here? And why was she naked? She rarely looked at herself naked. Tended to opt for mirrors that cut off below her broad shoulders instead. Most of the time her full-length mirror, which she'd found on the road and was warped in certain places (like most of the furniture and trinkets that populated her home – found on the road, warped in certain places – and sure, like her too), was turned around. She liked to approximate how her outfits looked instead of seeing them.

She reached up, sunk her fingers into her dense black curls, feeling around the surface of her head, but there was nothing. No bump. No blood, no bruised sensation. Not even the small pulse of a headache coming on. But that was impossible. She remembered that pain, how it had clutched her stomach, traveled up her throat. And now she was here, buck naked, her clothes circling her feet. Where had the time between here and the alleyway gone?

She tried turning away from the mirror to grab boxers and a t-shirt from the pile that sat

on her chair, her de-facto dresser. But an inner force kept her there, staring at herself.

“You’re not going anywhere,” she heard herself say, the words tumbling out of her mouth, which surprised her.

She’d never felt anything like it. This tumbling. Sure, she’d said shit she didn’t mean to say *plenty*, but this was different. Like someone else had said it.

She tried looking at anything other than the mirror. Her messy bed, the comforter and sheets piled into a snowman on the bottom-right corner. She missed having Hankeh there, waking up with her like a pretzel, the faint coconut smell of her hair, the blankets kicked off the bed, their collective heat keeping them warm. There was the tapestry on the wall she’d gotten for three bucks from a Polish market in a Hungarian church. It was like the queer flag but less corny than the rainbow one. Hers was red with stripes of pink, yellow, and orange running through it’s middle, and frayed at both ends. Outside her second floor window, which faced the street, there was the old man tending to his garden, moving in slow motion, as always, his thin white hair dancing in the light breeze, exposing his bald spots.

“Listen,” said the voice again. “I’m sorry it’s come to this. Personally, I hate being trapped in the smooth, vulnerable sack of flesh that is the human body. Did it for sixty years and swore I’d *never* do it again. You cannot believe what it’s like to go from a bodiless state, unbound by space and time and blessed with universal knowledge, back to the human form. It’s like wearing Spanx, being swathed in plastic wrap, dipped into a vat of hot peanut butter, and then thrown onto the hood of a car in rush hour traffic. There are as many ways of being as stars in the sky, *oui*, but this?¹ It’s the suckiest one.”

“What the actual *fuck* is going on?!” Blumeh shouted, not sure if this other voice would answer – or if she wanted it to.

“Oh right, I forgot how scaredy-cat humans are. I’ve been sent here by Lilith, the Queen of Demons, to take you on a quest.”

“A quest?”

“Yes.”

“But who are you even?”

“Oh, *tu sais*, I just spent my life subverting Nazis through surrealist propaganda with my lesbian lover, whilst contemplating the many mysterious and illusive facets of my being. It was no big deal.”

“Hold up – are you Claude Cahun?”

“I am. I love making people guess.”

“You’re one of my heroes! Whoa, I think I’m gonna *plotz*...”

“While I appreciate your admiration, get over it. No offense, but I wanna get out of your body as soon as possible. It’s terribly empty in here and freezing cold. Like a wind tunnel. And dry. So dry.”

“Ouch.”

“Which is why you must go on this quest. And not some Joe Shmo quest where you conquer exotic lands, slay dragons, and save a helpless princess. No. You’re going on an

¹ A line from Claude Cahun’s book, *Aveux non Avenus*.

internal quest. A quest through your own body.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve spent so much time hovering outside of your body – but not in a cool, enlightened way – in a scaredy-cat way. It’s time you got to know yourself. All of you.”

“I’m confused.”

“Don’t worry. Soon it’ll all make sense. But first, you must look at yourself in the mirror.”

“Do I have to?”

“Does Barbara Streisand sing?”

“Fine,” said Blumeh, turning back to the mirror, biting her top lip with the entire bottom row of her teeth.

Cool, sure, right on, there she was... all of her... her hairy calves were well muscled, her thighs dimpled and smooth. The small of her back was dry – she was always scratching that small circle of skin. She had tiny hands that people had called ‘dainty’, which she hated. Her belly hung from her hips over her pubis in a v-shape. Her black bush? Glorious. At least an inch-and-a-half deep, inky black, the hairs surprisingly shiny. It fanned out onto her thighs like a Pollock painting. Her feet. She’d always liked her feet. They were big in this way that made no sense for her five-two frame. She was a size ten, her toes thick and stubby and domineering. They were *not* dainty feet. They were get-out-of-my-fucking-way feet, or, send-a-man-flying-into-a-wall-with-one-kick feet. She’d like to model her whole body after her feet. Her brain too.

Her breasts. They were large, to put it mildly. She always forgot how large – like two hanging butternut squash with big brown areolas and thick nipples that were, at the moment, hard. She saw them as if they were on a different body, a body she desired for its femininity, but on her own they felt wrong. Out of place. Meant for another person.

“You’re not wrong about that, you know. Your breasts *are* meant for someone else,” said Claude.

“Who?” asked Blumeh.

“Your great uncle. You got the breasts he always wished for.”

“Seriously?”

“Yep. Listen, I know this sounds weird, but I want you to touch them.”

“Wait – what?”

“Just touch them anywhere you want, trust me.”

“Okay...”

Blumeh closed her eyes and rested a hand on each breast. A few seconds later, she heard noise all around her, people chatting, footsteps, a distant electric buzzing. And then a light – a warm, weighted light – began spreading through her entire body.

When she opened her eyes, a thin woman was staring at her. Though young, she was dressed old-fashioned, like sepia-toned photos of turn-of-the-century women. Her blonde hair was pinned into a loose bun atop her head, and her elegant long-sleeved dress was made of red silk; white lace wrapped around her forearms and neck, and a thick black belt synched her waist.

Blumeh looked down. Her chest was flat, her arms and legs long and wiry. A tingling, sinking sensation seized her, a spasm of fear. But then an anchoring warm light spread through her again.

This body was not hers. It was someone else's. What looked like a man's body. A man in scuffed, black dress shoes, grey pleated pants, and a long black suit jacket. He was in the midst of speaking, though she couldn't control his mouth. She couldn't control anything. The thin woman was listening to him, smiling, nodding along.

All of a sudden she was sinking again, but this time she let herself sink into what felt like soft, gooey flesh, until she dissipated into this other body, this other consciousness. His memories and thoughts becoming hers... His sensation moving into her, and hers to him like an umbilical life force...

(Shmek)

A spark was running through me. An anger that felt superbly wicked. That occupied me like a spirit. I needed to get out of the lecture hall as soon as possible, into the open air. But today was *fraytik*. Friday. And before leaving, I had to give Marika the address of the *mondscheinkneipe*, the wandering underground club for gays and freaks that I went to on weekends. Marika often joined me. But the location changed each time.

I was in the midst of writing down the address, when Hans walked up behind her, real close.

"You shouldn't be talking to him," he said to Marika.

"And why's that?" she asked.

"Don't you know? He smells like cunt," said Hans.

"Very fucking funny," I said.

"Incidentally," she said, "I smell like cunt too."

Hans smirked, stared at me for a moment, then spit. A small pool of saliva landed beside my left foot.

"And they call us uncivilized," I said.

"Itz, come on, don't talk so loud," said Marika.

Azoy.

So it was.

Me, the only Jew at the *universität*, and Marika, the only woman, had huddled into friendship at the beginning of term. It was lucky she turned out to be lovely. I adored her. And she wasn't as sweet as she looked.

I often wondered if I was the school's only *feygeleh*.² Likely not. Every *shmuck* was straight until he wanted a little MBP.³

We just got out from an anth lecture on *Foeter Judaicus* – 'The Smell of the Jew' – pre-

² Yiddish for "tiny bird". It's often used as pejorative slang for gay people, though some queer Yidn, such as myself, have reclaimed it.

³ An acronym for *metzitzah b'peh*, the ancient custom, rarely practiced in modern times, in which the Mohel – the person who performs a *bris* (male circumcision) – sucks on the circumcised penis to still the bleeding. But in the Hasidic community, it's slang for *yeshiveh* boys giving each other blowjobs in the *mikveh* (Dolman).

sented by that diabolical putz Heinrich.

Now, if you shovel off all the Latin bullshit, you'll sniff out (like a Jew – like the Jew that I am, with my big *shnoz* and my *shlong* tucked between my pale legs, like a dog, a *dog*) its more apt translation: 'Jew Stench'.

But what, pray tell, is this 'Jew Stench'?

FOETER JUDAICUS

The biological scent of the Jew, not unlike the sexualized stench of the woman, alchemized with the pungent smell of the Jew's food: garlic, onions, rendered chicken fat, and the blood of Christian babies.⁴ Furthermore, Yiddish, the Jew's language, is so primitive, so full of superstitious hoo-ha, that it stinks. When a Jew speaks, his words reek.

The second Heinrich wrote this phenomenon on the blackboard, my classmates lifted their hands to cover their noses. Everyone except Marika slid away from me, away across the wooden pews, as if I – my very being – was contagious. But part the Red Seas for science, am I right?

I felt like a Yid in chapel. Then again, the university might as well have been a church, so stuffed it was with *goyim*. And sure, I did smell things. I smelled fire, and smoke. The stench of *pogroms*, of fear, and sweat. And the air, sometimes it turned into carbon dioxide, like right then, and I absolutely had to get out.

On the hour-long walk home through unpaved, muddy streets and bursting tenements, the sun got demure as the night set in, and I daydreamed, as I always did, by playing role reversals in my head...

Imagine! Me, Itzik Finklman, presenting my findings to the class...

TIMOR CORPUS CHRISTI

After much careful observation of the Christian household, and various tests on the Christian body, I have discovered that the goy regards his own body with a peculiar, biological form of disdain. This, I have termed, Timor Corpus Christi, 'Fear of the Body of Christ'. The process by which the goy sees his body reflected in the body of Christ and seeks to destroy it. Alas, the Christian soul is trapped in a sort of purgatory. He stalks Earth like the living dead.

What causes the goy such psychological torture?

The miscegenational eroticism of the most unifying ritual of his church: communion. The act of taking Jesus's body into one's mouth. Christ, after all, was a Jew. So I ask you: in communion,

⁴ Fine, that bit about Christian babies was my addition. But aside from that, this happened. Thinkers like Nietzsche, and other prominent biologists, and anthropologists of the late nineteenth century believed that Jews emanated a specific, foul scent called "Foeter Judaicus" (Krieger 74). And that part about Christian babies isn't exactly untrue. It was a belief of an earlier time: the Middle Ages. In Europe, Christian societies believed that Jews baked the blood of gentile children into our matzoh for *Peysekh*, an accusation that often resulted in *pogroms*. Jews called this the 'Blood Libel'.

does the Christian mouth not suck on the Jew? Taste the Jew? Commune with the Jew?

Perhaps this is why the Christian prefers such bland foods. Struck by the fear of the body of Christ, the Goy who invented the communion wafer set out to stamp, flatten, and dehydrate Corpus Christi into a tasteless, calorie-free dot. Thus, unlike the Yid, the Goy smells like nothing. The Goy is a void. A trembling membrane of skin.

I arrived at my apartment just when the full moon began to glow. My building was little more than a loosely structured pile of wood and bricks. The lock on my door often took some jiggling, an enthusiastic push or two of the shoulder. When at last I broke in (I always felt I was breaking in) I realized how hungry I was. Starving. My apartment was a room with one window, a mattress on the floor, my dresser, and a small table and chair, a cutting board, fork knife spoon, a cup, a bowl, and a plate. The kitchen and bathrooms were communal. I didn't have much food, a loaf of rye on the table, some *matzoh* leftover from *Peysekh*, a sack of *bulbes*, and a few other things.⁵ I sliced myself a piece of the loaf and then, instead of my usual layer of blackberry jam, I spread it with duck *shmaltz*, a gift from mameh. For good measure, I minced two cloves of garlic and also sprinkled them onto the bread. As I scarfed the hefty slice down, the garlic burned my throat. I liked it.⁶

I had decided that tonight I'd smell. Tonight I'd dress up as more than a woman – a Yiddish woman. And not any *meydel*, but *Shabbis Hamalkeh*, the Queen of Sabbath, Grand Mystical Dame to Yidn far and wide. But for this, I'd *really* have to dress up.

I'd always wanted *mameleh* tits. Heaving, overflowing breasts. Breasts that made a man pounce or run away. Fight or flight breasts. I put on my large black, lace brassiere, opened the sack of *bulbes* and stuffed them into my bra. It had never occurred to me to do this. Normally, I used socks. These *bulbe* breasts of mine sagged, tugged at the straps, threatened to fall out, smelled of earth and starch. Their fickleness, how they shifted with each movement, made them more real to me. Maybe 'cause the embarrassment of a potato sneaking out, and rolling across the floor, felt akin to what a real breast slipping out might feel like.

I put a hand between my legs, tucked my *shmekl* into *shmunela*,⁷ and slid on my tight, matching lace underwear. I tucked not 'cause I was a scared dog, but because I was Cunt. Yes. Tonight I was *Yiddische* Cunt. I slid sheets of *matzoh* between the soles of my feet and my black high-heels. When I walked, I crunched. Crumbs would trail me wherever I went. Let the rats follow.

My lips, I painted a deep rusty red, summoning the blood of those Christian babies, like the hungry *nafkeh* I was. Come *goyim*! Plant your dead kids in our basements and we'll

5 *Bulbe* is Yiddish for the sacred food of Yidn: the potato. Also known as *kartofl*. And for those of you who prefer health over the pure old country goodness of a white potato, I give you the sweet potato: *batateh*.

6 The smell of garlic and onion was repulsive to Christian Europeans, who thought plain, bland food was more pure (YIVO).

7 Yiddish slang for vulva. According to RussianJewess in the comments section of the article, "A Vagina By Any Other Name...", the word's literal translation is 'a dark, warm place'. Other iterations include: *shmundie*, *shmoonie*, and *shmunda*. Other slang for vagina I've scavenged from the Internet and books: *knish* (salty pastry often filled with bulbes), *dortn* ('there' – the most passive aggressive), *peergeh* ('perogie'), *vilde lokh* ('wild lock'), and *mayse* ('story' – my personal favourite) (Rosenbaum). Or, as my Yiddish teachers tells me, *yenne mayse* ('that story') (Dolman).

bring them back to life with spices, dancing, and magic. With *klezmer* and *challah* and sweet ritual wine.

I put on my best *shtetl* clothing – cut two holes into the empty burlap potato sack, and wore it like a blouse. Took a brown drape from the window, and fashioned it into a skirt.

The final touch: I grabbed another clove of raw garlic, sliced it in half, and rubbed it all over my armpits. I reeked so bad it was good. I was hot as garlic's burn. Tonight all the boys would lick me, and the ladies too.

Tonight, I'd speak only Yiddish. At times it sounded like a made-up language, a language of non-language, of gut and emotion, not speech. And though many Yids had tried to lift it out of its pool of emotion and dry it off for the holy page – flicking off its flecks of *matzoh*, carrot, onion, and dill, expunging its sweat and menstrual blood with disinfectant – there was power in its immediacy. Yiddish was like music: its notes hit you first, you felt it first.

Tonight, I'd shout:

Du!

Shmek mayn shprakh.

Aynotem mayn verter.

Est mir.

You!

Smell my language.

Inhale my words.

Eat me.

From the hook on the back of the door, I grabbed my hat, scarf, and my long black coat, and headed into the dark night.⁸

A loud sucking noise rang in her ears, and then Blumeh was back, in front of the mirror. She felt drowsy, but in a good way. How toddlers wake up from a deep blank sleep, fresh to the world. Pins and needles tingled her limbs. It was sort of painful, but afterwards she felt light, airy.

“Itzik was my uncle, wasn’t he?” asked Blumeh. “The great uncle you were talking about?”

“More like your great-great-great uncle, but *oui*. You have many queer ancestors you know nothing about. This is why I’m here, to show you. You think you’re a single, sad *kneydlech* floating in a big pot of flavorless water. But I want you to see that you’re surrounded by hundreds of *kneydlech* and you’re floating in a rich stock that has been simmering on low for a long, long time. This stock has always been there, waiting for you to drink it, to

8 Adrienne Rich, speaking of her upbringing, said, “‘We... were constantly urged to speak quietly in public, to dress without ostentation, to repress all vividness or spontaneity, to assimilate with a world which might see us as too flamboyant... [to] make us unrecognizable to the ‘real Jews’ who wanted to seize us, drag us back to the shtetl, the ghetto, in its many manifestations,’” (qtd. in Krieger 94).

shep khokhme from its brown nutrient-packed waters. There's a reason they call it 'Yiddish penicillin', you know."

"This is all a metaphor though, right?"

"No, I'm not kidding you. Every Yid has her own pot of ancestral *kneydlech* soup she can draw from – it's its own dimension. And when you die, a part of your *neshumeh* will float around in there too."

"I'm gonna need time to process that one."

"Do what you want on your own time. As I said, I'm trying to get out of here pronto. Although, I have to say, it already feels a bit less windy in here. More like a light breeze at the moment. Anyways. I want you to touch your bush."

"You sure this isn't some kinky game you spirits play to get off in the Afterlife?"

"Not a bad idea, but no. I'm genuinely here to help you. And don't worry, it'll be easier this time."

"Who will I be?"

"I'll tell you after."

"Fair enough," said Blumeh.

She reached her hand down into her dark cloud of pubic hair. Again she sunk, and sunk into a thick warm stickiness, the boundaries of her body shedding as another consciousness assimilated her own...

(Hor)

I'd known the forest wanted me. Its floor was covered in blue leaves that dampened my bare feet as I walked along it. They felt related to my biology, like I'd shed them and now I was walking on old skin, as if the forest itself had hatched me.

The trees were taller than the eye could see. Millennia old. They stood like ancient *bubbehs* – sturdy, wrinkled, their Yiddish prayers carried off by the wind. In my tan leather satchel, I carried a small mirror, and in my arms a cylindrical box containing my tateh's *shtrayml*.⁹

I was travelling deep into the forest, though I knew I'd be alone. The townsfolk never went in. They were scared of the forest, the trees towering, their leaves so lush the sky was barely visible. This odd mix of sun and shade cast the forest in a peculiar darkness. People said it produced a hue like that of blue flames.

When, two generations ago, the great *sheyner* rebbe, Reb Shloymeleh, had entered the forest, his white robes became blue. Soon after he got ill and died. And, as they lowered him into his grave, the townsfolk noticed his corpse was that same blue.

Since then, the people called it *Genem af Erd*, Hell on Earth, and believed the blue was a wicked force. That blue, how she drew you in with her beauty, turned leaves into fairies, and sparkled the skin. How she made a blanket out of the sky, tossing it over the forest, so you could be *Adoynoy*, God, and walk the celestial planes. But, claimed *shtetl* lore, for a cost.

⁹ The fur hat men wear for *shabbis* and *simkhes*, Jewish celebrations and feasts.

Some said it was the blue of the City of Luz, whose residents were eternal, and possessed a snail, only found there, that produced a blue dye. But the forest's blue was immaterial, elusive. Became deeper as the night set in. Seduced you, even though you'd never clutch it. That was its power: slipperiness.

The only people I risked running into were kids, who liked to dare each other into the forest's depths. *Kinder* are closer to death, tempt it more 'cause they feel *eybik* – eternal. Maybe that's why they'd been cruel growing up – it's hard to be humble when you feel you'll never die. We'd played such dangerous games when I was a girl, before they realized I was different. Before I grew fangs and my brown eyes turned black. Before my golden locks became black too, and thick, and curly. Before I shot up six feet tall, and my dark hair spread out, over my upper lip, and my armpits, and beneath my chin, down my neck, and across my pubic bone, and multiplied along my arms and calves. Before I began to smell like smoked herring and wet earth.

Mameh wound scarves around my neck to hide the hair that grew from it, and like all *frum* women I wore long skirts and blouses. But nothing hid my height, my sharp jawline, imposing forehead, and piercing, solemn black eyes. I had no friends. Everyone except my *mishpokkeh* regarded me with fear, and even then I wasn't sure. I often caught mameh watching me from the corner of her eye, clocking my movements while rubbing her *tikh*. Did all women feel this way? Watched? Followed? Or was it only me?

I moved around in a cloud of itchy fabric. I wished to be naked. I felt drawn to the blue forest, wanted again to scale its trees, jump into the river, use sticks as swords.

New desires possessed me. When all the women bathed in the river, I noticed how Ida's breasts fell as she lifted her blouse, how her face and neck were dark from the sun but her body white as a rebbe's robe; this notion, that a woman could be white as a holy man's cloth, made me sweat, my skin became sensitive, the cool river water edging up me like a forbidden hand. At night, I dreamt of the blue forest, *Genem af Erd*, felt its blue heat. Yet I always awoke with goose bumps, the hairs on my skin erect, and mouth tasting of iron since, during sleep, I'd bite my tongue.

I became attuned to the scent of menstrual blood, my own, Ida's, the blood of all the *meydelekh*. Each woman's smelled a *bisl* different. Ida's like red wine, yeast, and hay. Mameh's like white onions, sugar, and *shmaltz*.

At some point, I ceased sleeping. Began instead to sneak into tateh's study, and read Yiddish interpretations of the *Toyreh*. Eventually, I found an exercise book for *yinglekh* and taught myself Hebrew, the *loshn-koydesh*, the Holy Tongue.

One day, after years of little sleep and much studying, my tongue turned blue. The forest was calling me.

I entered the forest on *Rosh Chodesh*, when the moon sits between Earth and Sun. Through a break in the ceiling of fluttering blue leaves, I saw only its thin white outline. I'd stolen tateh's *shtrayml* from underneath his bed when he was fast asleep.

Using a stream as my guide, I walked and walked, until I came upon a big boulder that looked like a fist. I balanced my mirror on its stone thumb, then slipped out of my clothing. Gently, I took out the *shtrayml*, and placed it on my head.

I looked in the mirror. The *shtrayml*'s fur was the same shade of black as my hair, but in the forest's darkness, it was blue. My hair, and the blue light, turned its fur wild. I looked like a *vilde chaya*, a wild animal. I looked like me.

It was good to be naked, to feel the breeze against my skin, the wind get caught in my tangled hair, to be liberated, at least for a moment, from the human, female form.

I stuck out my tongue, and made a licking motion. A school of fish burst out from the stream like a blue wave. This wave somehow moved between my legs, a stroke of wet cold. When I reached down, I was wet, my fingers covered in blood. But unlike all else in the forest, my blood remained red. I reached down again, and pressed my fingers against myself over and over, and as I did, the air began to smell like me, like smoked herring and earth. And with my other hand, I took the mirror and lowered it between my legs where fur and skin were coated in a hungry red, and it was *brudik* crude but *geshmak* at the same time. And when I came, I howled into the blue night and the ring around the new moon flickered red.

There I fell asleep to the sounds of the stream.

I awoke to branches cracking. Felt the presence of someone nearby.

"A volf! A volflak!" a *yingl* screamed. "Gevalt!"

Rushed movements shook the leaves and sticks snapped underfoot as the group of *yinglekh* ran back to the *shtetl*.

I grabbed the mirror and snickered. I must have bitten my tongue because my mouth was covered in red.¹⁰

A suck, pop, and a squelch and Blumeh was back again, in front of her mirror.

"Who was she?" asked Blumeh. "She was so... powerful."

"She was your great-great-great-great aunt, Yenteh *der Volf*."

"Did she call herself that?"

"*Oui*. From then on, Yenteh lived in the forest. And since no one knew where she was, the townsfolk believed a *volflak* had eaten her. The only one who knew about Yenteh was Ida, who Yenteh had visited in her dreams."

"Did they ever get *tsuzamen*?"

"Well, one day, Ida also entered the forest. And guess what?"

"What?"

"The *volf* ate her too," Claude winked.

"I see," said Blumeh, nodding and returning the wink.

"Now," said Claude. "I want you to go into one last person. Touch your nose."

Blumeh placed her fingers on the bridge of her nose.

The outlines of her body began breaking down into a sort of muck as she oozed into another life...

(Sh)(noz)

¹⁰ Jews have often been mythologized as werewolves, both by themselves and those outside of the community.

I was sitting in the sunroom, writing silly, distraught poems to my daughter's nose. There was too much sun. I was a hot puddle. But it felt appropriate.

The afternoon began with indigestion. Not from *esn*, but from my daughter. The second she walked through the door, this evil indigestion scrunched my organs, and forfeited the coffee, cream, and ginger snaps I'd had before she arrived, leaving them to wander aimlessly around my belly.

I never thought I'd be ashamed of her. I'd tried to raise her in a household free of shame. Free of roles, borders, doctrine. And yet today – *haynt, oy, haynt* – here she showed up with an entirely different *ander* nose.

Dear Judie,
Where, O, where did your *shnoz* go?
Is it in the garbage?
Or buried under a tree?
Is it in *Gehenna*, at last free?

Maybe I didn't get to her early enough. Or just, enough. Her father and I separated when she was three years old. Since then, he's had her on weekends. The first three years of life were formative. And those were three long years. Three years I pranced around and played housewife for a man I never loved. Three years I cooked and baked *goyisher* food that somehow always tasted like mayonnaise. If you thought about it, two days per week was a lot of time: one-hundred-and-eight days of each year looking at his second wife Pam's straight, feckless nose. Damn it.

But perhaps I shouldn't blame another woman for this. That's what we've been taught to do. I should blame myself. Or perhaps, I *shouldn't* blame myself. Women were first to take the blame. It wasn't my fault. It was the fault of this world, *Vu kayn got iz nito af der velt...* 'This world, where God isn't.' A line from a lullaby mameh used to sing to me. Some lullaby, huh? It was the fault of nation states, capitalism, assimilation. The fault of Graham Crackers and Cornflakes and, yes, mayonnaise.¹¹ Fucking mayonnaise.

Dear Judith,
Where, O, where did your *shnoz* go?
And who is this stranger, this fellow, the Nose?
He's always on your face!
He won't go away!
Where, O, where did your *shnoz* stray?

That *shnoz* was *alts* to me. Judie had mameh's nose. On Judie it became beautiful. Not that

¹¹ J.H. Kellogg (who's brother, William Kellogg, invented Cornflakes), was a leader in the American eugenicist movement that gained popularity in the early 1900's, which advocated for the sterilization of social outcasts. These early American eugenicists hobnobbed with the Nazi regime, both movements greatly influencing one another – though American eugenicists would disavow this after the Holocaust (Buckley).

it wasn't *sheyne* on mameh. Just hard to look at since mameh was ashamed of *me*. Ashamed when I married a *goy*. And then doubly ashamed when I got a divorce and came out as a lesbian, a word that wasn't even in Weinreich's Yiddish-English dictionary. Which was to say, in Weinreich's Yiddish I didn't exist. Or perhaps I did, but only in fantasy, in the faggy spirits that haunt folklore.

How could you? Mameh always said. *After everything that's happened?* After tateh got shot in the ghetto. After many more dead. After years of displacement, until at last we ended up in Steel City.

I knew about shame. It was carnivorous. *Treyf* like me. It even ate pork. But Judith. Judie, Yutke, Yudes, tell me: how could *you*?

And what will they call you now?

Will you go by Karen instead of Judith?

Will you go by *Goy* instead of Jewish?

Your *shnoz* let me see mameh when she was young and wild. When she'd sneak into *der bloy vald*, the blue forest she called "*Genem Af Erd*", for political meetings with the Bund. That was how she met tateh. *Oy*, how that crooked nose, hooked like a beak, gave you history. A thing so subtly, intensely attractive most people never realized they were looking at it, or that history was even a quality of beauty in the first place. So. When you sliced up that nose, you erased not only your history, but *ours*. Our history.

When you walked through my door, I thought I had dementia. I couldn't see you. You were slipping in and out your face. My memory of you eluding me in your own skin. Your face was a bad dream. A house in which I could hear the shouts of tateh-mameh, and my *brider* and *shvesters*, but never find them. Your face was a blank. A clean slate. A knife to cut something on. Perhaps me.

But what was a nose? Flesh, and cartilage, and bone. A vehicle for smell. Enhancer of taste. She could still do those things. But scent was also memory! How strange now that she could inhale mould, the smell of her childhood in that awful basement apartment on Kemper Ave, through her entirely different nose.

I needed a ritual. A way to mourn, and invoke my ancestors to mourn with me, so I didn't hold this against Judith forever.

Then it came to me: I needed a funeral. A funeral for her *shnoz*.

Dear *shnoz*, I will miss you so.

Like all the others I've seen come and go.

I'll remember you in the curl of my toes,

I'll remember you in the warping of notes,

I'll remember you, my precious little ghost.

I ripped out the page with the written verses and folded it into a small square, slipping it into the back pocket of my jeans. I stood up from my chair, grabbed a mixing bowl from

the cupboard, and began gathering any crooked, kinky thing I could find: steel wool, an old toothbrush with frayed bristles, a bent fork, a single dried fusilli, a neglected carrot whose texture had become rubbery and salacious through no fault of its own. I fished out an egg from the fridge, a pink birthday candle and barbeque lighter from the junk drawer, and placed these in the bowl as well.

I went downstairs, into the shared garden, and gathered more: an empty snail shell, a stick riddled with knobs, and a bedspring. A row of shovels leaned against the brick wall. I took one. Dug a hole about a foot deep, then got down on my knees and placed each item into it as if I were planting seeds. I cracked the egg on top, and threw the shell in the hole too. Eggs, mameh had told me, represented the circle of life. At Yiddish funerals, they served them to mourners hardboiled, to commemorate loss. Eat loss. I wanted the spirits to eat my loss. Suck it out of me like marrow from bone.

I lit the candle with the barbeque lighter, closed my eyes, and sung: *Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shnoz.*

Though I had no minion, I shovelled dirt back into the hole and said the Mourner's *Kaddish*, not for Judith's nose, but for mameh.

A year later, carrots popped up from the earth, and maybe it was me, but they were all bent slightly to the left like Judie's *shnoz*.

When Blumeh got back the sun was setting. A pinkish-orange backlit the buildings in front of hers, and though it was still too light out, the streetlights were on. At night she often felt a sense of doom, a sense she was failing, that she hadn't done enough in the day, and sleep was an undeserved surrender. But this evening she felt buoyed.

"I liked her," said Blumeh.

"That was Anka," said Claude. "Your *bubbeh* never talked about her. They were estranged. Lost touch in the eighties."

"So she was my great aunt?"

"Exactly."

"Is she still alive?"

"I'm sorry, no. She died right before you were born."

"Fuck."

"Yeah. You know that was a big thing in the sixties. Yiddish women getting nose jobs. Mad Magazine even made a song about it."

"That's brutal."

"Back when I was alive, before I settled on the name Claude Cahun, I was calling myself 'Claude Corlis'. Like the curlew bird. Its beak is absurd, long as the length of its entire body, and curved as the new moon. That was one of my first acts of surrealism. Of drag. If people were going to make fun of me for being a Jew, I was going to beat them to it, on my own terms..."

"I love that. But then, what do you think about top-surgery? Should I be exaggerating my breasts, making them ridiculous instead of hiding them away? I guess I'm wondering what the difference is between me and Judith..."

"You already know the difference. Those breasts were *never* yours. And, to be honest, Judith shouldn't be blamed for what she did either. She was doing what she needed to survive in this messed up world. We've all got different ways of handling the forces that seek to shame us."

"Yeah. That's true."

"Get the top-surgery! Cut those fuckers off and give them to Itzik. Have a proper funeral for them like Anka did for Judie's nose. That part, the ritual, is important. Otherwise they won't get to Itzik in *Gehenna*."

"Okay," said Blumeh.

"And one last thing before I leave. Give Gitl another chance, huh? Like I'm not saying go and marry her – definitely don't do that, marriage is *la foutaise* – but, you know, don't end things like you normally do."

"All right," said Buma.

"I must say, your body is so warm and fuzzy now, it's a little hard to leave it. But alas, I must go..."

"Bye, Claude," said Blumeh.

"*Au revoir*, my darling!"

Blumeh moved away from her mirror. But she didn't put on her clothes. She remained naked and got into bed. Before turning off her light, she texted Gitl.

Hey. Can we meet in ur minivan tmrw morning, usual spot? wrote Blumeh.

Sure, Gitl wrote back.

Blumeh and Gitl were sitting beside each other on the middle row of seats in Gitl's minivan.

"Nu, what's up?" asked Gitl.

"I've decided that I wanna try letting you touch me," said Blumeh.

"I'd love that."

"You would?" asked Blumeh, already feeling more vulnerable than she was used to. But this time she didn't feel alone. Or like she had to pretend she was unaffected. She felt the soup. She was bobbing in the *kneydlech* soup.

"Yeah, ya dink! I've been telling you this *afishtendik*," said Gitl.

"There's just one thing," said Blumeh. "I don't want you to touch my breasts."

"*Nishto problem*," said Gitl.

"Actually, two things," said Blumeh.

"Sure."

"Could you refer to my junk down there only in male terms?"

"Of course," said Gitl.

"Cool," said Blumeh, blushing.

Gitl put her hand on Blumeh's thigh. They began to kiss. Gitl kissed between her eyes, down her nose, neck, skipping her breasts, and then kissing down her belly, until she was between Blumeh's legs. She unzipped Blumeh's pants and pulled them down.

"I've always wanted to smell you," said Gitl, moving aside the slit in Blumeh's boxers

with her hand.

“And what do I smell like?” asked Blumeh.

“Many things. Cumin,” said Gitl, then licked her. Blumeh gasped. “And dill,” Gitl licked her again. “With a briny base, pickled radishes maybe.” Another lick.

“Oy,” shuddered Blumeh.

“But you *taste* like salt and you're so hard.”

When Gitl licked her again she felt the blue wave that had touched Yenteh, raw garlic and *shmaltz* flooded her nostrils, she tasted blood in her mouth, and that salacious carrot entered her mind. All of her senses, alive. Her mind oozing into her body...

Afterwards, she felt a little broken and a little whole at the same time, and a little closer to living her life in the first person. She and Gitl were spooning on the car seat, Gitl the big spoon. She was playing with Blumeh's fur, gently twisting it around her finger like a tiny tornado.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This chapbook would not have been possible without the resources and support of the Musée du Montréal Juif, and of Anya Kolwalchuk, and Misha Solomon.

Thank you Bubbeh and Zeydeh for your love, and for keeping our Jewish traditions alive; for your stubborn insistence that the family celebrate the High Holidays (despite our systematic *kvetching* about the seemingly endless *Haggadah*), and for all those years you fed us your Ashkenazi homecookin'. Those tastes, those smells, and your laughter were such a gift. Mom and Dad, thank you for your ceaseless faith in me. Thank you to all of my sweet friends, but especially Kirstie, Maddie, and Andrea. Thank you to my writing group – you know who you are – who never fail to give me revelatory critiques. And thank you Moishe-Volf Dolman! Your generous support, enthusiasm, and encyclopaedic knowledge on all things Jewish has inspired me so much and this project would truly be lesser without you!

GLOSSARY

- Adoynoy* – a name of God
Af shtendik – forever
Alef-beys – the Yiddish alphabet
Alts – everything
Amol – sometimes
Ander – different, other
Azoy – so
Bashert – soulmate, destined one
Bergleh – double diminutive of 'hill'
Beygl – bagel
Bisl – a little
Brider – brothers
Brudik – crude
Bubbeh – grandma
Bubeleh – term of endearment
Bukh – book
Bulbes – potatoes
Challah – egg bread
Chustpeh – nerve
Danke – thank you
Der bloy vald – the blue forest
Drek – shit
Erev Rov – the mixed multitudes that formed the Jews who left Egypt, a group of people who came from over seventy different nationalities
Esn – to eat
Eybik – eternal
Etz Khayim – Tree of Knowledge
Farkakt(e) – all fucked up, fucked
Feh – an expression of disgust or contempt
Feygeleh – literal translation is little bird, but used as pejorative slang for gay people. Has been reclaimed by some queer people.
Fraytik – Friday
Frum – religious
Gan Eden – Garden of Eden
Ganev – thief or shady person
Genem/Gehenna – Hell, more or less
Genug shoyn – “Enough already!”
Geshmak – delicious
Gevalt – "Danger!"
Gorgl – Adam’s apple
Gornisht – nothing
Goy/goyim/goyish/goyisher – gentile, gentiles, gentile-like
Goylem – Golem
Groys – large, grand, great
(Ha)malkeh – queen
Hanoë – pleasure
Haynt – today
Heym – home
Heymish – cozy
Himl – sky
Hor – hair
Kaddish – a Jewish prayer sequence recited at *shul*
Kakn – to shit
Khazer – pig
Khokhme – wisdom
Khreyn – horseradish
Kibbutz – community
Kinder – children
Kishkehs – the gut, intestines
Klezmer – Ashkenazi folk music
Klutz – a clumsy person
Kneydlech – matzoh dumplings
Knish – a stuffed potato dumpling baked or fried, also slang for vagina
Kugl – sweet or savoury pudding made from potatoes (bulbes) or noodles (lokshn)
Kvetch – complaint
Lamed Vounik – one of the (thirty-six) hidden sages that are said to exist in every generation and serve as an example for *tsaddiks*, righteous people.
Land – country, nation
Latke – a potato pancake
L’chaim! / khap a l’chaim – To life! Cheers!,

to take a shot
Lokshn – noodles
Loshn-koydesh – Hebrew, the Holy Tongue
Luftmentsh – airhead, person in the clouds
Making Shnel – to hurry
Mameh/mameleh – mama
Mamzer ben hanide – son a bitch
Mashkeh – whiskey
Matzoh – a sheet of bread without yeast, not unlike a cracker
Meshugeh – crazy
Meydel(eh)(ekh) – girl, little girl, girls
Mikveh – baths for ritual ablution
Mishpokkeh – family
Mondscheinkneipe (German) – club
Nafkeh – derogatory word for a sex worker or a woman who sleeps around
Nebekhl – a loser, a pitiful person
Neshumeh – soul
Nosh – to snack
Nu – “So?”
Oy (vey/gevalt) – a guttural exclamation expressing anything from exasperation to surprise to disappointment, and so on
Oylem abbeh – the world to come
Peyos – the sidelocks worn by some Orthodox Jews, most often Hasidim
Peysekh - Passover
Plotz – to burst, to explode
Pogrom – an organized violent attack against Jews
Potsh – slap
Punim – face
Putz – an idiot, a fool, slang for penis
Rebbe/Reb – rabbi
Rugelach – a rolled pastry that could be filled with chocolate, cinnamon, hazelnuts or jam.
Schmaltz – rendered poultry fat
Schmutz – an oily or greasy substance that soils
Shep – to draw out feeling from something
Sheyn/sheyne/sheyner – beautiful, learned in religious subjects
Shlep – carry something onerous
Shlong – penis
Shluf – sleep
Shmatteh – rag
Shmeer – a spread
Shmek – smell
Shmekl – diminutive of 'penis'
Shmunela – slang for the vulva
Shnaps – whiskey
Shnoz – a big nose
Shpilkes – nervous, restless energy
Shtetl – a Jewish town or village in the Pale of Settlement
Shtrayml – the fur hat that men wear for simkhes, celebrations.
Shul(s) – synagogue(s)
Shvaygt – "Silence!"
Shvesters – sisters
Shvitz – to sweat
Simkhe – happiness or a celebration, party
Tateh – papa
Tikh – handkerchief
Tikken oylem – repair of the world
Tish – table
Toyreh – Torah
Treyf – forbidden, not kosher
Tsuris – troubles, woes
Tsuzamen – together
Tsvey froyen makht beyz – Two women make evil
Tukhes – bum
Universität (German) - university
Veykhkeyt – tenderness
Vilde chaya – wild animal
Volf/volflak – wolf/werewolf
Yarmulke – skullcap worn by religious Jews
Yeshiveh – traditional Jewish school for boys who have had their barmitzvahs
Yid/Yids/Yidn – a Jewish person, the Jews
Yiddish/Yiddishe – Jewish, the Jewish language, Jewish-like

Yingl/yingleh/yinglekh – a boy, little boy, boys
Zeydeh – grandpa
Zeyer – very
Yisher Likht – memorial candles
Zog mir – “Tell me.”
Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement, a Jewish High Holiday
Zukhn – quest
Zets – punch or hit hard

REFERENCES

- Bower, Gavin James. *Claude Cahun: the Soldier with No Name*. Zero Books, 2013.
- Buckley, Nick. “How John Harvey Kellogg Was Wrong on Race.” *Battle Creek Enquirer* (January 9, 2020). <https://www.battlecreekenquirer.com/story/news/2019/03/21/john-harvey-kellogg-battle-creek-michigan-eugenics-race-nazis/3202628002/>
- Dolman, Moishe-Volf. *Weekly Lessons on Yiddish & Yiddishkayt*. Montreal. 2020.
- Klepfisz, Irena. “Queens of Contradiction: A Feminist Introduction to Yiddish Women Writers.” *Found Treasures*. Edited by Frieda Foreman, Ethel Raicus, Sarah Silberstein Swartz, Margie Wolfe. Toronto: Second Story Press, 1994, 1 – 64.
- Krieger, Rosalin. *Strategies of Survival: Meditations on a Jewish Subjectivity*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, 2000.
- Kumove, Shirley. *Words like Arrows*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.
- Lewis, Justin Jaron. “Eydl of Brody: Stories Against Stories”. *Imagining Holiness: Classic Hasidic Tales in Modern Times*. Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009.
- Neugroschel, Joachim. *Great Works of Jewish Fantasy*. New York: Overlook Press, 1997.
- Oberman, Sheldon, and Peninnah Schram. *Solomon and the Ant: and Other Jewish Folktales*. Honesdale: Boyds Mills Press, 2006.
- Patai, Raphael. *Gates to the Old City: A Book of Jewish Legends*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981.
- . *The Hebrew Goddess*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press; 3rd Edition, 1990.
- Philologos. “The Pros and Cons of Air Power.” *The Jewish Daily Forward* (August 26, 2009). forward.com/culture/112889/the-pros-and-cons-of-air-power/.
- Rosenbaum, Judith. “A Vagina by Any Other Name...” *Jewish Women’s Archive* (July 29, 2009). <https://jwa.org/blog/schmundie>
- Schwartz, Howard, et al. *Leaves from the Garden of Eden: One Hundred Classic Jewish Tales*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- YIVO. “Unit 3: The Ashkenazi Jewish Kitchen.” *A Seat at the Table*. New York.

Weinreich, Uriel. *Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary*. New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Schocken Books, 1977.

