Thank you for registering for this year's pre-High Holy Day discussion classes. Attached to this confirmation notice are three brief readings. Hopefully you'll find time to read them before the first session, for I believe they will provide occasion for lively discussion. Each of these, in its own way, is quite compelling. Whether and how they connect to our overall theme of *Jewish Life in a Post-Pandemic World* is a question best reserved for our time together on August 22.

Before we turn to a discussion of these writings in that initial meeting, I will briefly explore the history of the person our forebears called *"the Shabbos Goy,"* the typical neighborhood acquaintance who performed for a pious Jew what s/he understood to be forbidden from doing on the Sabbath or the holiday. That would have included stoking the wood or coal furnace, lighting the stove, extinguishing the lights at nightfall.

Today, of course, technology has come "to the rescue" with automatic switches, back up electronics, fail safe alarms, and clever work arounds. I will even show you the latest when we meet over ZOOM for our first session.

Variously, these readings can be labeled a memoir, maybe a memoir, and maybe a total fiction, but who knows, maybe not. They present a varied range of qualities:

- Relationships defined in turn by generosity and prejudice, love and hate, fear and misperception. Depicted are difficult social interactions, and some exceptionally beautiful ones.
- One tale suggests an intriguing flirtation, another admits of tender self-criticism, several speak of anger and duty.
- There is foreboding and notable embrace of otherness in several of them, too.

1. What is your view of how the authors deal with the depicted qualities/feelings/actions of these stories? Are there others that should be noted?
2. What is your response, in general, to the concept of "the Sabbath Gentile?"
3. Do you consider the "Sabbath Gentile" motif an intriguing "hook" used by the various authors to engage the reader, or do you find it much more, an indispensable element in driving home the thrust of the tale?
4. As a "moral yarn" that helps illuminate the human condition, which of these most speaks to you **now**? Why?
5. Do you find any substantive connections between these stories and any aspect of your life over these past 18 months? Could we invite you to share with our assembled ZOOM group, either in writing beforehand, or in person on that ZOOM Sunday, what you find most germane from these writings to these past eighteen Covid months of your life? If in writing, please send them to **bcytron@csbsju.edu** and please note if you are willing to have them shared with your fellow participants, and whether anonymously or with your name.

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"Those Damn Jews …"

Paul Engle

A writer's poignant memoir of a people whom he had been taught to fear and learned to love in a time of trouble

My life among Jews began with a fiery furnace when I was a kid of ten in that pleasant city of Iowa, Cedar Rapids, and continued at the fireless furnaces of Auschwitz.

It all began one day when our neighbor, who worked at a filling station and walked with a gait which my horse-handling father called "gimpy," stopped at our house; one morning and said bitterly, pointing down the street, "Those damn Jews have moved in." I had never known a Jew and assumed those people would have a different color or shape from us; in any case, avoid them. Our neighbor, thin, nervous, huge hands dangling from his wrists like untamed animals (his harsh eyes hinted that he used them to beat his wife and children) moved on to his day of gas and tires, leaving me in fear.

A week later I met a daughter of the Jewish family in our neighborhood drugstore. To my amazement, she looked like my aunt Effie, the quick-moving, who always shook her long black hair when she talked. The daughter seemed quite old to me, although looking back she was surely in her twenties. She spoke kindly to me, with an accent I had never heard, so different from our solid Midwestern pronunciation; we believed that God had put the letter r in the English alphabet so that it could be given an honest, haarrd sound. I moved away from her, still scared.

A few days later she stopped me on the street saying, "My name is Reba Goldstein. Do you want to earn money?" I could not speak. I looked for the quickest way to run home. She went on, "You come to our house Saturday morning. Light fires. Fifteen cents."

It was a tough decision. I was frightened of that house. I needed fifteen cents. Reba was no beauty, but when she smiled, the very bones of her face seemed to soften. She was so eager to have me say yes that she leaned toward me and held out her hands. I leaned back, afraid she would touch me with those Jewish fingers, those damn fingers. Then Reba said gently, "Paul, we need you. In our religion, we cannot make fire on Saturdays, because it is our holy day."

I knew about holiness, never having missed a Sunday-school class since I started at four years. But if Jews were also religious, how could our neighbor with the grease-grimy shirt use the word "damn" about them? And my Methodist church admitted that Christ was a Jew. On that sidewalk, the late autumn sun shimmering through a maple tree whose leaves had turned red, I trembled in the first moral dilemma of my life.

Reba spoke again, “Paul, we need you.” I had been staring down at my scruffy shoes as if they could of their own will walk me away from that moment of fear, embarrassment, and shame. I looked up at Reba. The smile on her plain face caressed my face. What came from her eyes seemed not damn Jewishness but sunlight. More than Iowa maple leaves hovered in that tense air.

“Okay,” I told her.

“Come at six-thirty Saturday morning. And thank you.” Reba floated off toward her mysterious house. I ran home, without the nerve to tell my mother.

So I got my first job. I became a Shabbas goy, a non-Jew who did on the Jewish sabbath, our Saturday, the work which Exodus 35, verse 3, ordered its people not to do: “Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day.” That ancient Hebraic law put fifteen cents in the pocket of a boy of “pure” German descent. How strange that my Black Forest shoemaking ancestors should have come to the United States and allowed me to lead a life of gas and fire among Jews.

On the first Saturday morning, in Cedar Rapids, that decent, tree-filled city, I knocked softly on the back door of the Goldstein house, ready to run from the horrors inside. Reba opened the door. Behind her was the grandfather, tall, heavily bearded, dressed in black, a black hat on his head, speaking to Reba in words that did not sound to me like a language, but like blackness talking. My filling-station neighbor was right. I came there at the risk of my life.

Reba led me up some steps to the kitchen. At the stove, I turned on the gas and lit it with a match, then put on the burners pots of food prepared the evening before. Grandfather gestured toward the stairs and I followed him down to the basement, in panic but lusting for that fifteen cents, and confronted the furnace, just like the one we had at home. Reba said, “First you shake it.” I shook the grates until the night’s ashes fell down and only the coals remained. Then grandfather pointed to a dark room. I entered it, ready to fight or flee. He pointed to a pile of corncobs and a scoop shovel. Suddenly, great joy and peace came to me; I was back in my own element. The corncob was the central object of my life. My father was a horse handler, first trotting and pacing horses, then coach horses, then work horses, finally saddle horses. I grew up around, on, and under horses, fed them, shoveled their manure, emptied the mangers of corncobs. I was an expert on that symmetrical art form so honored in the folklore of American life before modern plumbing.

Corncobs are the greatest fire-making tinder. Grandfather opened the furnace door and showed me just where to put my scoop of cobs at the back of the grate. There was wood kindling in the dark room, and I added some to the fire. Then I added coal, banking it so that the fire would burn slowly and last all morning. I adjusted the draft to low, and my early-morning work was done. The black voice spoke to Reba, who told me, “You’ll be fine, he says. Come back at noon,” and she patted my shoulder with those long Jewish fingers; they felt like the velvet of my mother’s one good jacket.

I walked out into the glittering daylight from the dungeon of the cellar, a free man, an exuberant heart, a worker with a weekly income doing a useful job that had a vague religious shimmer over it. That morning I played with my friends in an exalted state, my Methodist soul rejoicing that now I would be celebrating two sabbaths. And getting paid!

At noon I was back, turning out the burners on the gas stove and stoking the furnace again. Grandfather’s hands danced as he dramatized in air how I was to shape the cobs, the wood (very little needed at noon), and the coal so that it would last until, with darkness, he could do it himself.

As I opened the back door to leave, the fifteen cents shining in my hand—for how could I hide the coins away in my pocket?—the old fear came back. Walking toward me from the alley where he had tied his horse to a telephone pole, was a man, a kosher chicken hanging from one hand, a few spots of blood. I had been warned about Jews by my gentile friends—they did terrible things with knives to boys. Without thinking, I clutched myself and ran down to the cellar. But that person in his long black coat and his strange hat followed me. I jumped into the coal room, now my salvation. The stranger went over and put the chicken in an icebox and then came up to me saying, "Are you Paul, the new Shabbas goy? It's a good name, Paul." And he went up the stairs.

Gradually my reputation as a loyal worker spread. Another Jewish family a block away hired me. Then the rabbi, and my fortune was up to forty-five cents a week. Once the rabbi took me to the synagogue across the Cedar River, and I entered even that mystery without fear.

My real grandfather's name was Jacob Reinheimer. My Jewish grandfather's name, I found, was something which sounded like "Yacov," the same name. We began to talk to each other, he in Yiddish and I in English, so that soon each began to learn some phrases of the other's language. The rabbi taught me a few Hebrew words. I was the linguist on my block. Once when our filling-station neighbor walked by, I yelled a Yiddish phrase at him. He stopped, stared at me with those cruel eyes, and said, "Paul, they're getting power over you. They killed Christ. You'll fry in hell." And he strode off to repair more inner tubes. I considered my fate for a moment, then decided that if Reba and grandfather Yacov were with me in hell, it wouldn't be so bad.

I tended my fires for years. Sometimes on cold autumn days I would be playing pickup football on the school playground when Reba would appear on the sideline waving to me. I understood. The gas fire on the stove had blown out. I would leave the game, often to howls from my team, "Come on, Paul, we got a first down, you can't go. Wanna carry the ball?" But I always got on my bike, went and started the flame again, and came back in time to have my teeth rattled or my nose broken (it is still crooked from being kicked sideways—my neighbor who wrestled tires all day said it was proper punishment for my Jewish sins).

Then I met the poet, out of a Jewish immigrant family from Vienna, son of a peddler of tin pots in the Ozark Mountains of southwestern Missouri who still drove over the tough hills (the "arcs") selling pans out of a buggy to the poor families clinging for their lives to those rocky slopes. His son's name was that of an angel, Gabriel, and he could be a devil. As a kid he had spoken Yiddish and Osage and then learned English from Catholic sisters; his talk was full of Christian phrases and Ozark Mountain talk, invocations of the saints and earthy references to the fact that men and women were really made out of the humble body of the earth. I was writing poetry and so was he; mine was about the usual glories and horrors of adolescence, his about tough-minded, tough-muscled, and tough-talking Ozark farmers.

I had long since given up carrying the torch as a Shabbas goy; he had long since given up actively running his department store after a massive heart attack. After hours at my drugstore job I would go to his apartment, where he lay on a couch in a robe, and intone my poems in what must have been a revolting and cracking voice. Gabe would listen with interest, and then say, "Now Paul, I've got a new one," and he would read in a near-hillbilly accent a poem of violence and love and hate and hound dogs which would have shocked his Viennese ancestors.

The years rolled their brutal course down the hill of time. Still poor, my clothes still smelling of the horse barn, still writing those doubtful poems where too much emotion clashed with too many words. I went one evening to Gabe and told him that I had just been given a Rhodes Scholarship for three years at

Oxford University. He looked at me with those strong and fiery eyes that lit up all of that weakened body. Silence while he handled the shock of my news. Then he said, quietly, "What clothes are you going to wear when you land in Oxford?"

I looked down at the cheap stuff I was wearing. "These."

Gabe's temper was like an owl—it was quick to take off and it could fly through darkness. With the shout of an Old Testament prophet accusing a sinner, his small hands making large circles in the air, each of his eyes a burning bush, he screamed at me, "No son of mine [by then I had become an honorary son] is going to go to England looking like that! Go down to the store tomorrow. I'll leave orders. Start from scratch. Get an outfit that won't make us ashamed. Jesus Christ, if you'll excuse my using that expression, you look like a bum. And now you're going to become a god damn gentleman, the first one in your family." He paused for breath. Then he said with a great effort (he was not supposed to become excited because of his failing heart), lifting his hands toward me in a gesture of love such as I have seldom known in a life which has been lucky with those who have loved me for the person they thought I was, "Paul, I want you to start with a bare ass. Get everything." Across the room, his shaking hands seemed to touch my forehead. I could not read a poem. I could not speak.

Next morning I went to every department of Gabe's store. Socks, underwear, shirt, neckties, suits, overcoat, raincoat, hat. Looking back, I can see that one suit must have been a horror; it had not only trousers and jacket, but also a revolting object called "golf knickers," emphasizing my naturally bowed legs. When I walked through the ancient dark gate of Merton College, Oxford (A.D. 1256), in a university which for centuries Jews had been forbidden to enter, I was wearing wholly Jewish clothes.

For my Oxford degree I had to translate French and German philosophy (as it turned out, Descartes and Kant) at sight without a dictionary. That meant Germany for my first summer vacation, to learn the thorny language on my own. With grammar, phrase book, and dictionary I lived up in the mountains of Bavaria. There I met Franz, the truest European I ever knew. He sang folk songs in French. He had taught at the school in Bishop's Stortford which Cecil Rhodes, my benefactor, had attended. He had left England in July, 1914, for a month at home in Germany and never returned, caught in the division of students which was later slaughtered at Langemark. He had written a Ph.D. dissertation on "Die Philosophie von als ob," the philosophy of "as if." Nothing could have been more relevant to Nazi Germany of those years than the concept of reality not as existential being, but as if what you experienced in your blind emotions were actually actual.

Franz invited me to spend Christmas, 1934, with his family in Berlin-Friedenau, one of the suburbs absorbed by that great stony capital. I haunted the bookstores, especially around Von Kleist Platz. By then, I could translate the rhythmical, image-loaded poems of Rainer Maria Rilke, a German from Prague, secretary to Rodin, isolated, dressed like a girl until he went to military school, needing human companionship as a dog needs bones yet frightened of intimacy and commitment. There was one shop I returned to almost daily, for it had a shelf of Rilke books in half-leather, what the Germans called *Schmuckausgeben*, fine editions. I would take them down not to read but only to hold. It was like touching the skin of Rilke to feel that soft binding and the colored title pages. One day the old man who owned the store came up to me and asked, "Would you like a cup of tea?" The store was long and one room wide; a corridor led along one wall, with small rooms off the left, all of them crammed with old books. We carried all the Rilke books with us. I assumed he was going to offer me a special discount if I bought all of them, but even that I could not afford. He showed me into a room with table and chairs. The Rilke books were placed on the table between us like sacred objects brought back from a long-sealed tomb. I could not touch them.

The old man called out to a closed door. Soon tea was brought in by an obviously very intelligent girl of sixteen, hair and eyes black as night, but glowing, glowing. She bowed to me and fled. Pouring tea, the old man said gently, as if he were blessing a child, "I see you like Rilke. Take them. Take all the books. They are too precious to sell."

Suddenly, they were mine, those loved poems written by that poet always in flight, in Worpswede, Paris, Switzerland, in a castle above the Adriatic, the poet who always had women looking after him but could not live with his wife, the poet Germans called *der weibliche Dichter*, the feminine, or womanly, poet.

"Why?" I asked.

He stared at me the way an animal will look at a human being into whose hands he is entrusting his life. Total, no reservations, to the death. "I am a Jew."

He waved his hands toward all the rooms of books. "They will destroy all of this." (He never used the words for which "Nazi" is an abbreviation; they were always they. But I knew, I knew, from the darkness in his voice.)

Then he turned and gestured toward the door the lovely girl had closed. "I am old. It does not matter. But my daughter, that girl." He could not speak, his throat muttered wordless sounds which were the most moving language I had ever heard. Again, I weep inside to recall it.

He turned his eyes toward me. They burned my eyes.

"She must go. Out of Germany. We are the damned Jews." (Old filling-station neighbor, you knew little of what you were saying. You would have looked at home in a *Sturmabteilung* , a brown-shirt uniform.)

"I know your name. It was on a traveler's check you gave me for some books. You are Paul. You are American. You are the lucky one. My daughter, Rebekah, get her out. Take her out. Leave me to die. We Jews are very skilled at dying. If you are in trouble, come to Jews. They know so much about it."

The room shrank to my body's size. For a moment, I was in a trap, its teeth on my neck. Outside, I seemed to hear the Nazi boots marching, the shouts in marching cadence, "*Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil* ." Victory, victory; over the helpless little man opposite me, his thin hands trembling, his head shaking, the tears of two thousand years falling down his cheeks.

"I will try," I said stupidly. "I will try."

Rebekah entered the room. Standing close to me, she said nothing, bowed with more dignity than I had ever seen in a human being, picked up the teapot as if it were a chalice on an altar, and backed out of the room, looking at me, looking at me, with trust, with trust, a flame which miraculously could walk across the floor and close a door. (Back home a month later, I found people who promised to help. I wrote the family. My letter was returned stamped *Verschwunden* —"disappeared." Do not be patient with the frightfulness of the human race. Howl, howl. From your dark cave, howl.)

That evening it was Friday, and after dinner Franz said, "Now Paul, tonight someone will come. We will go into that room." He pointed to a little odd room in the center of the apartment, the room without windows or outside walls. "Speak softly." All week such bits of food as would not spoil had been saved. Now they were put on the table.

"Who is coming?" I asked.

Franz whispered, "*Die alte J'fcdische Witwe*," the old Jewish widow. "She was my friend's wife. He was not Jewish. But she must eat."

It could be death for a German to do what Franz was doing.

There was a wide stairway up the front of the building, and there was a narrow iron stairway at the back. We heard small steps on the iron. The kitchen door had been left unlocked. It opened softly. A tiny lady in black carrying an empty string bag came in and sat down without speaking. Franz went over and took her hands. There in Berlin, with all hell about to break across what has laughingly been called civilized Europe, a brave German embraced a terrified Jew. I remember thinking in that moment, "Paul, you better go back to Iowa. You haven't the strength to be a part of this appalling life. Go back to your safe and friendly Jews in the clothing store."

The widow suddenly saw me and put her hands over her eyes in fright. "Is he one of them?" she asked Franz.

He shook his head. "He is our American friend."

"America." She spoke the word as if it were the magical incantation which could open sealed doors and deliver you into heaven, which was, quite simply, a farming state called Iowa which had no Nazi party. "America, America." She rolled the word on her tongue as a child treasures a piece of candy, wanting it to last. She left with her scraps. At the door, as she stepped out into the dark pit of Berlin, she looked at me in disbelief and spoke to no one, only to her own anguished mind, "America."

Next morning I left Berlin. Lying in the gutter outside the apartment building was a dead man, hands bound behind with adhesive tape, ankles bound with adhesive tape, a wide strip of tape across his mouth, one over his eyes. The Nazis had come again in the night. And dear Jewish widow, did you make it home with the remnants of our humble food?

On the way to the railroad station, the old Potsdamer Bahnhof, we passed a little store with its windows smashed. Hung on the door was a sign***, Deutschland wird Judenfrei*** —"Germany will be Jew-free." Franz took my hand, then shook his head in the ancient gesture meaning no. He dared not talk in the presence of the taxi driver. He knew it all. He was mourning the dead to come.

The night before leaving, Franz and I had gone into the one room in his apartment that had no outside wall. As he closed the door he looked at me and muttered, "In this tragic country, walls listen, walls talk, then people disappear." I asked why he hated Hitler.

"Because he is anti-German," Franz replied.

"But he shouts about Germany all the time," I said.

"Yes, he howls, but he is against all things beautiful and great in our culture. He is like an animal barking in the deep woods the Romans found when they came north."

When I arrived in New York from my Oxford-European years (ironically, on a German ship, the Bremen), I was waiting down in third class while a tug pulled us into the harbor. The purser came through, holding his nose at the degradation of slumming in that area so deep in the ship, so crammed with people obviously poor and obviously not too well bathed. He held up a letter in his right hand and called a name. Finally I realized that it was mine. He held it out to me carefully, so that his pure Aryan hand would not touch mine. He did not know that I was pure Aryan, too.

The letter was from Gabe: "If you have come back from Europe without having spent every cent you had, you are no son of mine. Here are a few dollars. Don't spend them on anything sensible. Love." I had in fact arrived without money to take a cab with my luggage away from the dock. I wrote Gabe my address in New York. Next week a telegram arrived with money for the fare to Florida and a message buried in his usual way of expressing affection: "Come on down and stew in your own Jews." I went.

By then I had discovered that Jews were indeed damned, but in ways my hard-eyed neighbor could not have imagined. I had found his kind, those who marched east to die in the snows west of Moscow (he gladly would have joined them) in honor of that pig with the little row of pig bristles on his upper lip. I knew about pigs, that noble animal so abundant in Iowa, and I apologize to them for the comparison.

In Kraków the night before I went to visit Auschwitz so many years and so many deaths later, a German-speaking Polish person had held out his hand toward me, asking, "Do you know what that is?" No, what is it? "That's a dead Jew."

Innocent, I asked, "But how do I know it is a dead Jew?"

"Because," he said, "if it was a live Jew it would be doing this." He rubbed his thumb back and forth across the palm of his hand as if he were counting money.

Human life is too difficult for people.

At Auschwitz I stood on the caved-in gas chamber by the vent through which the canisters of "Zyklon" gas had been dropped into the room crowded with naked men, women, and children. I felt my Jewish grandfather who had fled Poland, the Cedar Rapids rabbi pointing at things and speaking their Hebrew names, old Gabe battling pain like a boxer, Reba who hired me for a *Shabbas goy* , the old man in Berlin who loved Rilke's books, his daughter Rebekah, whose eyes are on me as I write these inadequate words, I felt them walking toward me with their devoted but accusing eyes.

I was back with my own Jews. I was home. The railroad tracks that had carried those suffering people were just beyond the place where I stood. A thin whistle of a train on its way to Krakow. The dead crying.

The white birches trembled their leaves in the white sunlight (the Nazis had called the place Birkenau, "the place of birches"). My feet sank into the concrete. I was too moved to move.

Excerpted from:

To Jaffa

Ayman Sikseck

I was ten years old when I first set foot in the synagogue down our street. Samaher and I were sitting on the wooden seesaw that stood outside our house that summer, and mum was sitting across from us on the threshold, peeling clementines from a plastic bowl resting between her thighs. Dad had brought home the fruit the day before from Qalqilya in two overly stuffed, straw sacks. The clementines were bursting with juice and the fleshy, sweet chunks melted on your tongue. I had tastefully eaten piece after piece; much to the pleasure of my mum, who was quickly peeling more fruit.

Samaher was first to notice the young man in the black brimmed hat, nervously going from door to door. His eyes were wide open and he seemed hopeless. Summer was already coming to an end, but this was an exceptionally warm evening. "Good evening," he said, turning to mum. He removed his hat, revealing pearls of sweat all around his head. Mum nodded hesitantly in reply. "I'm sorry to bother you, but the lights in the synagogue have to be turned on in a little while." Samaher looked at me and smiled conspiratorially. "And Sabbath hasn't ended yet," he continued, drying his face with the back of his hand and smiling at our puzzlement. "We need someone to turn on the lights in the building."

"Ah … I understand," mum said relieved. "Of course." She offered him the bowl of fruit and turned her face to me. "Me?!" "Yes, whom else? Me?" She laughed and put the bowl back. The man was already making his way down the street. Nervously biting into a piece of clementine I had in my hand, I got up and followed him. I made sure to lag a few steps behind, so I could shoot angry looks back at mum.

Halfway along the road, some boys from the neighbourhood, who were just lining up in tight rows for a game of dodge ball, spotted us. They stopped what they were doing and curiously looked back and forth from me to the figure in black that was walking in front of me. "What are you doing?" Nimrod called out to me, cupping his dirty hands around his mouth. He turned to look at the boys surrounding him, making sure they could all see. "Are you going with the cockroaches?" I lowered my head in embarrassment and tried turning to the right in order to ignore the man in black that was leading me as best as I could.

As far as I can remember, this was the first time that I wished my mother would die. I crushed what was left of the clementine in my hand and wished it was her head that was being squashed between my fingers, ripped apart, its fluids dripping on the asphalt and on my shoes. He really does look like a cockroach, I thought to myself. Goodness knows what they do in that synagogue; maybe this whole thing about turning on the lights is just a set up. Mum would feel so bad if something was to happen to me. If only something would

happen, just so she would suffer and be eaten up by remorse.

We turned to the entrance of the building, the last one on the street, and entered the synagogue. It was completely dark and smelled of hot candle wax. I squinted my eyes in an attempt to make out the man leading me from the other figures in there. We moved on to a small, windowless area with a few old chairs standing in one of the corners. With his fingers he signalled to two boys who were standing there waiting, leaning against the wall, and then turned to yet another, broader entrance. I hurried after the man in order not to lose him, but before I could enter a strong hand suddenly grabbed my shoulder, stopped me in my tracks, and pulled me back. I couldn't see a thing. It was pitch dark and I wondered what they did here in the dark. My hands were sticky from the dried-up clementine juice.

"*Yamma*,*" I said. "This way," a voice said over my shoulder and directed me to the wall on the left. I turned to the wall, carefully climbed onto the chair that was already put there and reached my hand to the light switches. "Thanks," he said, when the light in the room went on. Now, I could see that the man was smiling. His face was narrow and he had red blotches spread randomly across his forehead and his cheeks. The heat suddenly felt unbearable. I bent over to get down from the chair and he held onto the backrest with his hand to keep it from collapsing under me. "You're welcome," I said and I realized I wasn't in the actual synagogue, but rather in a sort of rectangular shaped entrance hall leading to the synagogue. (…)

Nimrod was waiting for me across from the bakery, his old football tucked under his right arm. "Weren't you planning to play dodge ball?" I asked. "Sure thing." He walked alongside me. "We played two rounds, I won both times." "Already? How come?" "How come you are hanging around with them?" he shot me an angry look. "My mum says it is forbidden to come near them. That they are thieves living on her salary." (…) "That it is their fault we can't go see aunt Yasmin on Sabbath morning, because they've decided it's forbidden for the busses to run," he continued. "They also call the police when you bring your dog to the park near the intersection, because they hate dogs." "But what can the police do about a dog?" "I don't know, kill it," he answered. "Anyway, you shouldn't be walking around with them. Did you forget that it's because of them that we had to end my birthday party in the winter? Even when you turn on a tape recorder, they get the police." "But they asked for my help," I tried to explain. "They needed someone to turn on the lights. You couldn't see a thing in there. It was a little scary." I looked at him for a moment and then added, "And besides, my mum made me do it."

** In spoken Arabic, the expression yamma (יאמא means "mum" or "my mother." It is also said when someone is scared or sees something scary, in which case it conveys a meaning similar to the English "oh my God."*

Photo © Moses Benson

Ayman Sikseck is an Israeli-Arab author, literary critic and opinion journalist, who writes in Hebrew. He was born in 1984 in Jaffa, where he still lives today, and holds a BA in English literature and general and comparative literature from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His successful debut novel, *To Jaffa*, was published in 2010, and translated to Arabic and German. His writing tackles questions of national identity and the still-evolving social fabric in Israel.

Sikseck won the National Library of Israel's 2013/2014 scholarship to encourage young Israeli writers following his debut novel. His second novel, *Blood Ties* (*Tishrin*, in Hebrew, published in 2016), was a runaway bestseller in Israel and won him the Prime Minister's Prize in 2017. *Blood Ties* was nominated for the prestigious Sapir Literary Prize.

Sikseck currently works as a journalist and news anchor for i24news TV channel in English. He is working on his third novel.

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The Shabbos Goy

Helen Schulman

We were in Paris all of three weeks, my baby girl and me, when we saw our first bride. Without my cat-eye glasses, from afar she appeared even farther away; the world's teeniest bride, like a miniature pony. Upon approach, however, it quickly became clear that she was merely a child, probably only around four or five years old, a wafting meringue with legs. The family that followed were obviously Orthodox Jews, the father's black suit a slim elegant contrast to her pearly float, his fedora girded by a satin band, but even still, I thought: is she taking communion? Because the little girls in my neighborhood back in Brooklyn often dressed this way, in tiers, when receiving their initial Sacrament. Only when a pudgy older sister followed in an identical halo of tulle and the helium of her own high spirits, did I realize that both girls were simply members of a wedding, and that I now lived down the street from a synagogue, from which the conventionally proportioned female newlywed was at that moment making her royal exit. The doors were guarded by two telltale gendarmes, one Asian, the other African, in riot gear and sporting automatic weapons.

The next afternoon it rained, but when I took my daughter out grocery shopping—me in my plastic yellow boots, the human cupcake safe and dry in her Snugli—I spied through the silvery murk another sylph in white, exiting the sanctuary and entering a convertible parked outside the temple, glumly holding an umbrella over her veiled and golden head. Soon it was about a bride a day, a never-ending pageant of women eagerly entering the world of marriage, one I had painfully, but most willingly, left behind.

After the divorce, after I'd picked up the handsomest sperm donor I could find at a bar in Red Hook, after I'd struggled with nursing the baby while navigating the IRT from Brooklyn College (where I eventually got fired for sleeping with a student) up to Columbia (where the same transgression got no official response), after teaching eleven courses a year as an itinerant adjunct professor finally killed my love of literature and, well, my love of people in general—my old camp friend Maggie asked me to come help her liquidate her English-language bookstore. She had married a Parisian, a cute jazz musician she met on her junior year abroad, gave birth to three kids, now almost fully grown, and had lived the girlish dream. Her children spoke English with mellifluous French accents, they dressed with flair and all drank wine responsibly, and over the years when I visited I had often coveted Maggie's life, full of books and music, thin thighs and rich desserts, unpaid bills and her husband's girlfriends. When one of these *femmes* became pregnant with twins, that ended some of that. E-books undid the rest.

The bookstore, *A Moveable Feast*, was located in the Marais, the 3rd arrondissement, traditionally the Jewish quarter, now a mixture of the LGBT crowd, well-heeled artists, and a daily influx of shoppers, much like the

Lower East Side of Manhattan or Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin—lots of trendy cafes, galleries, and stores, with a few remaining kosher bakeries, falafel and Judaica shops for the rapidly dwindling holdouts. It was tucked away in a little medieval cobblestoned plaza (which hadn't been so great for sales, but was big on charm) and was as tiny and crammed and disordered as the last several years of Maggie's life—and mine—so while we cataloged and boxed the stock, we often brought the stack of hardcovers outside just to make sense of them. I kept a plastic exerciser on hand for my daughter to spin in; it was unisex green with little stuffed dolphins affixed to the sides like carousel horses so she wouldn't get any princessy-pink ideas; I'd scattered some fabric books to bite on along the plastic trough that encircled her, and a handful of French Cheerios (*au miel et aux noix*) for her to chase down. This way I kept her close by my side as I worked.

Since I'd last seen Maggie, she had grown very thin—with her red hair tied loosely back and her freckled, boney chest, she looked like a Walker Evans, a result, I'm sure, of all those cigarettes and misery—so I often stopped at the *boulangerie* on my way over to the store in the morning, and had an array of treats, *Viennoiserie*, laid out atop a mobile bookshelf to tempt her. It was only around 11 a.m., but it was unusually hot for May, global warming. I'd rolled up my sleeves and hiked up my skirt as I sorted and dusted. At some point I'd tied up my short curls into a seemingly hilarious topknot, using one of the baby's cleaner bibs—very *I Love Lucy*. Maggie did a spit-take whenever she came outside to cry or order me around, which I suppose made the outfit worth it. So I wasn't exactly in full flower when the rabbi actively did not approach me. Instead, he stood to the side and surreptitiously sorted through a pile of books. His obvious caution, plus the greed of his fingertips, the venerating holy way with which he bellied up to our merch, like he was pilfering God's own private wet bar, proved that whether or not it was cool for the rabbi to immerse himself in secular texts, he was indeed a reader, not a civilian.

"May I help you, monsieur?" I said. I supposed it would have been kinder to have let him do his thing alone in a lonely way, but I was bored. This was an English-language bookstore and that was pretty much all my French. *Monsieur*. Except for "*un autre verre de vin blanc, s'il vous plait*" or "*quel est le putain de tomate?*"

"No merci, madame," he said, with a slight bow. Caught off guard and purposefully staring now at the fascinating cobblestones beneath us.

There was something familiar about him. It occurred to me that I had seen him before, so I asked, "Do you live on my street? Rue des Tournelles?"

I thought I spied a little light bulb turn on above his head right then. Whatever, he continued to glance downward, but he was somehow looking at me through his third eye. I could sense it.

"My shul," he said. "My street."

"My street," I said. My game. My curiosity.

"42 Rue des Tournelles," I said, and his neck, long and curved like an egret's, slightly stiffened.

"No," he said, incredulous.

"Yes," I said, impressed by incredulity.

I noticed that the book he had been reading was poetry. Dickenson. *Pain has an element of blank.* It was a poem I'd tried to turn to while my marriage was disintegrating, but the words had shriveled and flown off the page like ashes. *It has no future but itself.* I shut the cover and returned it to the rack.

"Not that it matters, but are you Jewish?" The rabbi's English was thick with a Yiddish/French accent. A Semitic patois.

"No," I said. "I'm not."

Because I was hot and lonesome and somehow perpetually furious, almost to entertain myself, I said, "Are you?"

He looked at me, startled.

"Not that it matters," I said.

I learned late, it was something he was trained *not* to do: look me in the eyes that way.

His were an unearthly blue. An empyreal Caribbean hue, the shade of a sun-filled swimming pool in a magazine ad, made wavy by the perfumed pages' highly reflective gloss. They did not belong to the topography of his face, nor to this dank and sweaty French courtyard, smelling faintly of piss and spilled wine and lined with mossy stones, mushroomy corners. In the distance I heard a splash, the entrance of a dive, the sound of my solitude being knifed aside. A cleansing spray of hope atomized up my spine. For a moment, I thought we were both going to laugh aloud. The moment passed.

"I am a superhero," the rabbi said, with a raised eyebrow. "Disguised as an Orthodox Jew."

He wiped at his forehead with a broad white hanky. He was young, I saw, beneath his beard. Quite a bit younger than I was. Maybe not yet thirty. He had those handsome blue eyes, but his skin was pasty under a lustrous sheen, like a piece of marzipan with a hard sugary glaze. He was wearing so many clothes and the sun was so hot, that he looked as though he might pass out. The rabbi smiled weakly. "Menorah Man," he said, but he seemed to waver in the currents of heat that emanated from the pavement as he said it. It was almost as if he were fading from sight, but wearing wool. Which gave him shape.

"Sit, Menorah Man," I said, gesturing toward a chair. "You look dizzy."

He protested as he sat. But sit he did.

"Eat," I said, and I pointed to all the goodies scary-skinny Maggie had turned down: pain au chocolat pistache, almond croissant, and those cinnamon swirly things—I forget now what they called them, something yummy "au raisin"? Escargot!

He said, "No, thank you," but reached for the gooiest most chocolatey treat of all, a brioche that oozed molten dark-brown lava, some vanilla crème and the faintest architectural remnants of melted chips—his ruin. Before he bit in, he asked, "Is it kosher?"

"Sasha Finkelstein?" I asked, referencing the landmark Jewish bakery from which the baked goods were locally sourced. It seemed kosher.

"Sasha Finkelstein," he said, and, as if all his problems were solved, he took a deep, satisfying bite.

We couldn't help ourselves, the rabbi and I; we caught each other's gaze and cracked up. That eruption of belly laughter! My daughter's eyes widened, startled by the sound. Poor baby. It was new to her.

“So, Mr. Superhero. Any women on your squad?” I knew full well that I was flirting, but that is something that I do naturally, without thinking. Just not usually with rabbis.

“Dreidel Maidel,” said the rabbi, chewing thoughtfully. The color was returning to his cheeks, reflecting the red-gold of his damp side curls.

“Are you serious?” I said.

“It’s a serious business,” he said. “Acts of human kindness. Making mitzvoth. Hard to manage without the help of a righteous woman.”

A righteous woman. Who was that? Somebody who wasn’t a whole hell of a lot like I was. “Ah,” I said, “but you have seen right through me. She is my alter ego.”

He looked, for a moment, skeptical.

“Something needs to be done about my karma,” I said, more honestly than I’d meant to.

“Need?” he said, something in him brightening. “That implies that you would find it beneficial. . . .”

Yes, I nodded. I was in it for the benefits.

“My congregation,” said the rabbi. “We could use some assistance. This very weekend. In your very building. From a Gentile.” Again, he shook his head at the coincidence.

“Not that it matters,” he and I said, in unison.

The baby laughed. She clapped her hands. The rabbi and I laughed too.

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A few days later, the rabbi came again to the bookstore. Maggie and I had almost finished putting the last of the poetry paperbacks in boxes, and we had a little red wagon out front where we placed them. Thierry, her eldest and my favorite of her offspring, six feet tall now and ludicrously handsome, was to ferry by hand this precious but humble cargo across the bridge to the Ile de la Cite and then over to the Left Bank. His destination was Shakespeare & Co., one of the last English-language bookshops in Paris to endure. It was a place where print lived, wild and free, as it once had done at A Moveable Feast, and writers and readers still roamed. The bookstore was run by a young couple, so lovely and kissed by God that they didn’t need to do one more thing to improve their karma, but that did not appear to stop them. They’d offered to purchase Maggie’s remaining stock.

The rabbi was wiping his face with a hanky. “Is it that hot out?” I asked. This morning had felt cooler.

“Some hoodlums, they spit on me, as I crossed Rue de Rivoli,” he said, looking both embarrassed and upset.

“Who?” I said. “Oh my God,” I said. I picked up my bottle of Evian. “Would you like to use this to wash up?”

“Paris is getting worse and worse for us. I’ve soaped my face three times already,” he said. “But still, I feel it on my skin.”

It wasn’t like I was stupid; I knew things sucked for the Jews in France. I had eyes; I saw the swastikas painted on the Shoah Memorial when I took the baby to the Ile St. Louis for ice cream. I’d seen that video, “Walking in

Paris While Jewish," which followed a middle-aged man, wearing jeans, a sweater, and a yarmulke, traversing ten arrondisments in one day, while being cursed at, kicked, and shoved by random people he randomly passed. But now it was my very own rabbi being targeted.

Nervously, he picked up a volume off the top of the pile—he could not control his hands—and in an effort to change the subject, I supposed, offered to buy it. "I have the original at home," he said. "I am curious about the translation." Anna Ahkmatova's *Twenty Poems*, converted into English by the poet Jane Kenyon.

"When I used to read, she was one of my sad favorites," I said.

The rabbi stared at me with his kind blue eyes. "Used to?"

"It is too painful and annoying now," I said. "All that useless truth and beauty."

"Useless? For me, literature has the power to heal." He sighed heavily here, I supposed, at the burden of a statement somewhat blasphemous. "It was Kenyon who wrote, 'Sometimes the sound of the dog's breathing saves my life.'"

"When I first read that poem, I ran out and adopted a puppy," I said. Like the husband, he didn't last long.

"What is the price?" the rabbi said, discomfited I'm sure by his confession and the weirdness of the moment, but I pooh-poohed him.

"Don't be silly," I said. "Please, I insist. Take it as our gift." And then as if I were a windup monkey and someone else were talking, "You'll have to let me know if Kenyon does justice to the Russian."

"I will," said the rabbi, looking again at his book, ah but for that third eye. "Now, about Friday night . . ."

He took a deep breath. This spiel of his would take stamina. "Elvis Presley," he said, which wasn't where I expected him to start. "Martin Scorsese. American Christians, who at one point in time generously executed the services you are about to perform. According to the rules of Jewish Law, it is possible for a non-Jew to complete certain tasks, which Jews are forbidden from performing on the Sabbath, having to do with labor, using electricity, handling money. I am told when Al Gore and Joseph Lieberman were in the American Senate, Lieberman, who is *shomer Shabbat*, would sleep on his couch in his office before Saturday votes, and Gore would turn off the lights for him. Your general, your Colin Powell, in his youth, too, leant such a caring hand to a Jewish neighbor. He ended up fluent in Yiddish. Even the president of the United States"—here the rabbi could not wring the pride out of his gentle voice—"President Obama, did such charitable acts as a young man, with loving kindness in his heart.

"I could never have requested this of you outright—a Jew may only accept the work of a non-Jew if it is of his or her own free will and for his or her own gain. But you volunteered."

Yes, indeed. Out of regret, existential fear, or maybe just ennui, clearly, I was ready to volunteer for anything.

He reached into his pocket for his handkerchief once more and wiped away at that indelible hateful spittle.

That next week, he said, a man and a woman were to be married in the rabbi's shul, and the bride's American relatives had rented a flat in my very building through the very same website that I had, Paris Ooh la la! (Please note: that exclamation mark is the company's, not mine. I reserve my exclamation marks for important things.) As with many apartments in Paris, the outer door to the building was unlocked only by pressing a series of

numbers on a matrix that then buzzed one inside. The lock itself was electric, as were the light switches I turned on by my footfalls as I ascended each stairwell landing. Since I would be entering and exiting anyway, I could safely usher the wedding guests into the interior lobby, Friday dusk through Saturday nightfall, "until three stars are visible," the rabbi said. After that, my services no longer would be necessary.

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Although they arrived earlier in the week, I did not meet the Grynbaums until Friday night. The mother was a specialist in infectious diseases, the father a pediatric oncologist. They seemed less religious to me than the rabbi—the father was clean- shaven and wearing a hat. I could not tell if the mother wore a wig or not. The three teenage boys sprouted more hair on their necks then on their still-soft, steamed-bun-white cheeks. A younger girl called Sasha, maybe ten or eleven, her hair tied back in a minky braid, looked an awful lot like a Degas ballerina.

At around 11 p.m. they hollered up to me from the street, as they could not use the phone or the outside intercom. I leaned out the window in my T-shirt and sweatpants and waved. They thanked me so profusely when I came down the steps, my baby wide awake and ready to rock, and fussed over her so satisfyingly, that I practically swooned from all the attention. For so long, only Maggie had admired her.

"What a cutie-beauty," the mama cooed.

They were New Yorkers, like me. All four children went to a private school on the Upper East Side. They were *thrilled* to be in Paris.

"The food," said the mama, "the wine! We haven't been here since Greg finished with his residency." They had had Shabbat dinner at their relatives' that very night and stayed out late talking. "We picked this place because it was in walking distance from my cousin," she said. "We didn't even think about the door code," and then she stifled a pretty yawn.

My cue, so I pushed the wooden door aside. We entered the stairwell, ladies first. At the ground floor landing when I took a first magic step a dim little hall light switched on automatically illuminating just the next stretch of staircase up, and instead of cursing the darkness, I was suddenly grateful for the short-sightedness. The road ahead was mercifully only lit by the length of my own headlights, and as I climbed those steep stairs I thought that perhaps the move to France, however temporary, had been a smart one. I was helping Maggie. I was assisting this nice family. I was doing good.

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The following Thursday, the caretaker at the synagogue fell ill with appendicitis, and the rabbi stopped by the store. I was deep in the stacks in the basement, boxing up the anthologies.

The rabbi came down the steep steps carefully, to ask me how it all had gone.

"They were so lovely, those Grynbaums," I said. "I'd do it again in a heartbeat."

"It is warm down here, reminds me of the sanctuary, without the fans," said the rabbi. "Too bad the caretaker won't be there tomorrow night to turn them on."

"Bebe and I can do it," I said, transformed into a person with purpose.

“Bebe,” he repeated, delighted I suppose by my growing French vocabulary.

At this my daughter lifted her arms to him, and the rabbi automatically boosted her out of the playpen that I’d fashioned from dictionaries and a beat-up wooden desk I’d laid down fort-like on its side. I guess he was an old pro at picking up babies, he already had three of his own at home. He pressed his lips to her forehead and I watched her relax in his arms, returning his kisses to his nose.

“It’s been a long time since anyone but Maggie or I have held her,” I said.

*“‘*Sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness,’” he recited.

“Kinnell,” I said. “‘Saint Francis and the Sow.’ Are you even allowed to like that poem? It’s so Catholic.”

The rabbi, shrugged. “It speaks to me,” he said.

The words suddenly came back to me and I recited too: “‘To put a hand on its brow of the flower and retell it in words and in touch, it is lovely again.’”

“We like the same things,” he said, bewildered. With one arm around my daughter, he put his other hand shyly to my brow, I suppose to remind me, too, that I was lovely. At that moment of supreme pleasure and recognition, I found my way into his and bebe’s embrace by wriggling myself inside, and then as preposterous and natural—both—into the path of each of their lips.

When eventually we shyly parted, he whispered heartrending words of apology. But I waved them off. No need. I was glad for it all, and not sorry one little bit.

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After that, the rabbi came to me toward the end of the day several times a week, to let me know the odds and ends of the congregation’s desires during Shabbats. I might light the pilot light of a forgetful elderly couple’s oven. I loved going on a last-minute errand to pick up a bridesmaid’s matching lipstick. If anyone needed groceries or medical supplies, I was their Dreidel Maidel, as I could handle money. When payment for my deeds was involved, it came to me in advance so that it felt like a gift instead of labor. But all of it felt to me like a gift, the payment, the work, the blessing of being able to help make a mitzvah for someone else, supporting the rabbi, being in his company.

There in my apartment, before evening services, the baby napping in the Pack ‘n Play by my bed, the courtyard’s afternoon light streaming into the bedroom, he would read to me out loud from the Russian poets—Tsvetaeva, Mandelshtam and Pushkin—in English and then in Russian, his grandmother’s native tongue. “When you’re drunk it’s so much fun— / Your stories don’t make sense. / An early fall has strung / The elms with yellow flags.” Ahkmatova wrote this for the Italian painter Modigliani, when they were lovers in Paris, their spouses out of sight and out of mind. Reading together this way was so intimate, I suppose in a sense we too were having an affair. I mean I had made a couple of passes at him, but it was a no-go. “I am married,” he’d whispered in my hair. But it didn’t really matter. Sex I could get anywhere. “I have a good wife,” he’d said. “But we married so young. . . .” In the fading white jet-stream trail of his sentence, I imagined her as a baby bride herself, like the child I first saw on Rue des Tournelles, someone beyond envy.

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Finally, when there was nothing at the store left to box, sell, or give away, Maggie and I decided to throw a crazy-assed goodbye party, inviting the workers, our customers, the expat writers who'd crammed the packed aisles during readings with their tiny audiences of friends and former students and local alcoholics looking for free wine. I wore a long white lacy dress I'd found during the *soldes*. I put my daughter in a sky-blue tutu. Maggie rocked a short skirt and a plunging neckline and stilts for heels—her twenty-some years abroad had taught her well; she looked startlingly good for someone who felt so awful, and she wisely began drinking at eleven in the morning. Soon she was dancing on that downstairs desk in those pretty red-soled Louboutins she'd purchased at Bon Marche when she gave up on paying rent—we'd brought the desk and the rest of the furniture out into the yard. Francois, Maggie's ex, even wandered over in the afternoon and ended up playing the piano until 2 a.m.

The baby and I talked and sang and drank, and if I kissed a famously sexy British writer with the initials J. D., who was there to know or care? At around three in the morning, Francois wisely took it upon himself to walk Maggie home—she was trashed and crying, mascara spiderwebbing underneath and above her lashes. How purely his arm fit around her waist. For Maggie, there was no tomorrow; the store was gone, she and the youngest of the three kids were flying out the next day to spend the rest of the summer in the States at her family's home in Michigan. I'd been invited, but I'd declined. The good people at Shakespeare & Co. had offered me a job as events coordinator, but I wasn't sure if there was enough for me in Paris to stay on without my best friend. I had one week left on my sublet, so the clock was ticking, but isn't it always ticking ticking ticking until it stops? "'Look, just as time isn't inside clocks, love isn't inside bodies,'" I quoted Yehuda Amichai to myself as I watched Maggie and Francois stumble together down the cobblestones. I silently wished them both a night of good sex and no backsliding.

Most of the crowd was gone now, the wine bottles and plastic cups out in the garbage bins, the trays of food long devoured. Besides the piano, the desk that Maggie's sons moved back inside, and some empty shelves, there wasn't much left to steal, but I locked up the store anyway. Both J. D. and Thierry, Maggie's boy, with cougar lust in his eyes, offered to walk the baby and me home. J. D. even drunkenly proposed to put us up for a time in London, or was it Capri? But Paris in the summer, even with all the tightened security, is an all-night party, and I was sober enough and thus sensible enough, for me at any rate, to send them both on their way, with kisses on both cheeks.

The baby was sound asleep in the Snugli as we turned up Rue de Tournelles, which was gray and empty and puddled. Parisian streets were always puddled: rain water, urine, wine. Up ahead, the entrance to the shul was locked up and blind to the street. The gendarmes had either gone home for the night or were themselves out at the clubs. I had not spent much time thinking about them, the strain or tedium of their work, what they thought about the threat to the congregation, to themselves, to their way of life. If they cared or not, if they cared desperately. It was overdue, but I thought about them then.

Up ahead across the street was the heavy wooden door of my building. On the other side, my side, was a religious man I knew.

"It's so late," I said.

"I was worried about you getting home," the rabbi said. "But then I saw you brand new, in your white dress . . . like one of our own brides." His voice flooded with relief, but it was also somber. "I've come to tell you that me

and my family, we're leaving. My uncle found us a congregation near him in Miami Beach. There is no safety here for the children."

I nodded. Children come first.

"They threw garbage at Rachel on the street, with the baby in the carriage. My older boy was teased and tormented on the metro. There was a bomb threat at the school. One of the teachers was stabbed as he was walking home."

His eyes were so sad. The world was a cracked plate, splintered and chipped, at any moment ready to break. Maybe even shatter completely.

The baby stirred against my chest. The rabbi put his open palm on her head, almost as if he were giving her a blessing. "'Hope is a thing with feathers,'" the rabbi said. Dickenson again. Then we kissed for the second and last time, and before I had a chance to beg or thank him or even punch him in the nose, he walked away in the direction of Place des Vosges, toward his home and his apartment, I assumed, but I didn't even know where that masked man lived.

The baby and I crossed over to our building.

I punched in the door code, but I must have forgotten the numerical sequence. So I tried again, and then again, scrambling the numbers up and casting them out, for minutes it seemed, and while I fumbled I thought, now that I am nobler, almost a righteous woman, what was next? The sky grayed and pinked and in the clear light of day, it was my baby and me, alone again, but in Paris. Beautiful, anti-Semitic, terrorist-ridden, xenophobic Paris. On the other side of the river there was a bookstore and in that bookstore there were books and work, if I wanted them.

With a whoosh, the numbers came back to me: 54321.

Duh.

I plugged them in and the door opened.

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