

THE OUTLIERS

poetry - prose - essays - possibilities



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THE OUTLIERS

CREDITS

Welcome to *The Outliers*, a sourcebook for both *Dream Askew* and *Dream Apart*. It features the work of ten brilliant contributors – writers, historians, poets, game designers, Rabbis, activists, and community members.

For contributor bios and social media links, visit buriedwithoutceremony.com/outliers

Dream Askew is by Avery Alder

Dream Apart is by Benjamin Rosenbaum

Two games of *belonging outside belonging*

Cover Art for The Outliers by Jez Gordon

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INTRODUCING

DREAM ASKEW

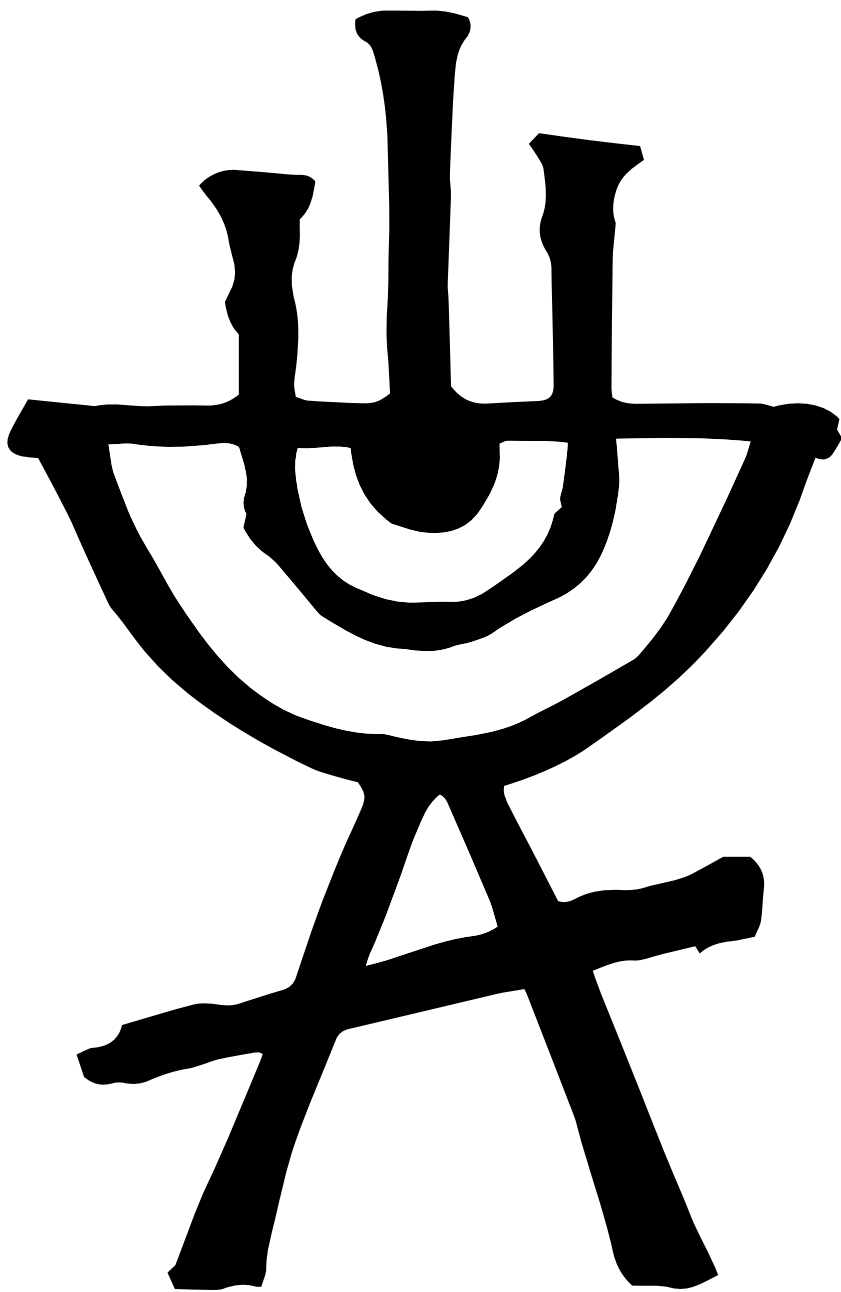
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DREAM ASKEW

DEAD FIRE

DIA LACINA

At first, we tried to help. Again and again. Offering our understandings to the people who had rejected it, burned it, tried to beat it out of us for generations, not realizing it was in our bone, sinew, coiled deep. But in the end, all we could do was wait.

And while we waited, we found each other. The children of those who'd seen this before and managed to survive. As civilizations that vilified us fell apart, we traveled the bones of their bleached corpses, toward each other.

The oldest of us had lived this before—a government watching its “undesirable” citizens die, get driven underground, corralled into camps, stripped of everything, even languages and history. They told us the stories of how they'd seen this happen, heard about it from those before them, not just here—everywhere.

“We are the children of survivors,” they'd say. “Our peoples have already faced the end of the world.”

And we'd cling to each other as the cities darkened, the last police sirens gurgling to silence—sharing what we had left, the parts of ourselves they couldn't overwrite or steal. It wasn't much, not compared to what was taken. But we committed to leaving their world sealed in those tombs of glass and concrete.

What we could find and remember of ours—we recovered, we shared. And what we couldn't, we found new language for. We filled in the gaps with new stories—some tattooed on their bodies, others collected them on scraps of paper, painted on the walls of dead cities. Sure, we struggled. But through the smoke in the skies, we could finally see the stars again. Dead fire, so alive.

THE ONLY TIME YOU KNOW

CARIBBEAN QUEER ENCLAVES AFTER THE UNRULY WORLD

BRANDON O'BRIEN

You don't remember the days before the storms: the days when government ministers who are already dead today frowned on the evening news at the mention of you; the days when reverends who are already dead today insisted that you loving it in the ass would bring the hurricanes and fire (when the irony is that those things were made further north-east by straight white warmongers, and besides, you survived by the grace of something heavenly); the days when magistrates who are already dead voted that loving it in the ass was a violation of the law.

But this is still true in Earth's twilight: outside the entrance of your village, a man will be disgusted by you, or by a woman close enough to be your sister, or the kid whose name you just learned. They will say that what comes next is your body's fault.

They are wrong. You know this. But that doesn't salve the sting of it.

Inside is thornier. These people love you, want you to have the life they imagine is ideal; this makes operating within its society so much harder. Most elders, for instance, are still debating with younger citizens about what survival means: mainstreaming their identity to outsiders, a focus on martial force over diplomacy, isolationism over trade. Faith is still a source of conflict: those who came before you have still held strong to the old orthodoxies, however adapted to be sources of love and respect, whereas some young people have renounced religious identity to the point of working to reject all practice in their spaces, a history their elders have been eager never to repeat; some other young members have instead formed their own

syncretic structures of belief, adopting obeah practices, pandeist cosmology, and apocalypticism to justify living in harmony with an unruly natural world and waiting for our eventual release from mortal suffering. Sometimes, these ideological clashes can operate in relative harmony. Other times, the smallest theological question leads to disconnects among the entire village. Asking some of these questions have done more to weaken your home than lacking their answers have.

Just where you live can make survival harder. If the pipes and drills run outside your gates, then maybe you can get a generator running, or your most resourceful citizens can manage to make something more useful than fire; if a water reservoir near you is clean, you no longer have to go through the long effort of purification. But just one such useful feature of your surroundings can draw foreign threats close. However, not having access to any of them means working harder at all times just to gather necessities for your neighbours. And to complicate things further, there are even more numerous ways to be in an area that is actively hostile to settlement: wild flora, mutant fauna, or even more chemically volatile weather systems, such as acid rain with levels capable of burning through flesh, or persisting tropical storms which circle the Atlantic without losing pressure.

All of this sounds like hopelessness.

Instead, consider it a springboard for hope.

However you answer these questions gives shape to a Caribbean that survives. If anything is true of history, it is that the islands are resilient, its people sturdy. Consider that your homeland has survived the kinds of apocalypses that people don't consider apocalypses—the pillages and plagues of colonisers, the rumbling fire-belly of the Ring of Fire and the roaring winds of the ocean. Terror has always been on your gate. You are now fortunate enough, however tenuously, to be in a village where your body is not a source of shame. This is a blessing—something you were not lucky to find even when the waters were calm.

You don't remember the days before the storms, though. Which is also a kind of blessing.

SPINDRIFT

BRANDON O'BRIEN

If my grandfather wasn't still around
to prune unruly vines beyond his verandah,
I wouldn't ever learn how eldritch
our love metaphors are.
You are my lilac seafoam
licking the outskirts of my form.
You bubble over, a spectacle
of softness, born of beauty and bruised gaea.
You are the deep groove in Gramps' old calypso records,
proof that when something works, you enjoy it
as much as it will let you
but before your love cuts through it.
You keep doubting your own name,
but it touches my tongue like ambrosia,
sparkles, fizzes past my closed lips
like begging to be known. You widen
in my vocabulary, effervescent.
You appear unexpected in hope's sight line,
make me gasp, "gosh, would you look at that!"
and would you look? The neon tremble
of new froth sparkling on the shore,
and you swaying the same to Kitchener's 'Pan in A
Minor',
older than us both, and Gramps, older than us both,
correcting himself—nah,
nothing ain't really change, in truth.

GLASS CAVE

BRANDON O'BRIEN

you does ever think about
the fact that we live in a
monument to torture?
a glass iron maiden some pale rider
make like they make it to kill God,
like it high enough to cut through hope—
we sleep in that easy,
I guess hell does be warmer and drier
than we did think, and all the demons
waiting outside instead. you does
ever just think about that? how
we does make a bed beneath some dead
bandit's office desk and hear the mind-wind
as if they thank destiny for destroying it all;
how the elders does kneel with scared legs
outside the glass doors downstairs
like they asking to be forgiven for entering sin's castle.
they does joke that when we need fire,
we actually starting the coals with what people's
lives used to count up to, what used to grease a rusted
world
before God break the rainbows and try to drown we.
they say they not sure if it's miracle or not
that we sleep in this house. but we sleep.
destiny ain't dead. and when God come back
for the remainder of what have to break,
we could only hope we have we bags packed
before She reach. until then, at least
when the scratches cry out how they deserve better,
you listening to them too, and we taking notes,
so nothing scratches again.

REBELLION

DAVID COLLINS

Until 1963, the United States only portrayed mutants as cinematic deformities. Melted bodies altered by radiation and toxins. Creatures that were once human, transformed into mindless piles of otherness. They depicted a fear of nuclear fallout, and of the future humanity dreaded most. Loss of power and control. Losing the image of the country they valued so dearly.

The Civil Rights movement opened eyes and ears to voices largely ignored. The conflict was consideration. Who was more human? More deserving? Is the color of your skin, the way you speak, who you love, your *you*, worthy?

In '63, the conflict met art. Between the pages of Uncanny X-Men #1, for 12 cents, the revolution happening in the streets of the United States was reflected. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, doing battle as Professor X and Magneto. Mutation was no longer about The Bomb, or the fallout, or the fear of external war anymore. It was about us.

“Who am I in this world that does not wish to see me? A world that ignores me or shuns me, and wants to kill or enslave me?”

Questions that lead to more questions.

Between the colorful comic pages, internal conflict often sparked the mutant gene. For the readers, that genetic realization was a mirror of their social self-awareness. People of color come to understand what the looks they've been given all of their lives truly mean. Anyone outside of a cishet white male sexuality or gender has to face that they're not included in the vision of the American Dream, or even the American Reality.

And what follows? Fear. A welling of anger and distrust over what is, commonly, the most powerful and most shameful part of the self. You're a mutant. Something other-than. Seen as less and foreign and unclean. Painful concepts, far from truth.

But when inspected, in self-love, community, and in that intersection, one might find something else. What that inner spark really means. How your connection to the beating of your heart, the pulse of your breath, and the honesty in a self-accepted existence, brings one to find that the change isn't truly a change at all. It's a conflict. A battle between a world that denies that you are evolution. You are reality.

You are rebellion.

STRONGHOLD

**KAYL CASSIDY,
NORCAL DEGENERETTES**

We start with the warehouse, dilapidated but still four outer walls and a roof, strong doors with strong locks, and working water— enough space to house the small commune of Stronghold, aglom of queer souls in need of warmth, in need of each other. United by circumstance and their general queerness, love doesn't always come easy, and it grows in different ways.

Here you find yourself at what has affectionately been dubbed the Big Kid's Table, long and crowded, where Stronghold convenes to address its extensive itineraries scrawled in Sharpie on cardboard. Just about everyone has a need; together they listen, debate, decide, direct. Big personalities and strong voices may grind inside the skulls of more reserved folks, while those who are always talking, who always step up to lead, sometimes wish they could drop the reins knowing everything would be okay. This one is tired of feeling like they're the only person tending the garden properly, and that one says the scavengers need to come up with more canned goods. This one says the scavengers have strength in higher numbers, and they want to know who's going to volunteer. This one just wants new blankets, and suggests forming a quilting crew with anyone of a crafty inclination. They all disagree over what needs to be addressed first.

It's been four hours of this already, with small breaks here and there for snacking and stretching and slipping off to the bathrooms. Stronghold meetings famously run long, even when the To Do list is on the shorter side, so the community sets aside a whole day and hopes it doesn't need it. Not that this isn't good, important work. Not that this can't be a helpful or deeply healing experience. It can just be a very tiring one.

Rai, a gardener, mentions a pack of “hoodlums” wearing a never-before-seen commune logo roaming the neighborhood the past few days. They declare there might be some sort of turf war on the horizon. Murmurs break out around the table, anxiety and anger crossing the faces of the commune. Rai notoriously and baselessly dislikes outsiders, and loves to stir up a crowd.

As the room swells with overlapping, arguing voices, your fellow scavenger, Witny, pokes at your arm for attention. On a sheet of paper that was supposed to be for taking notes, Witny’s drawn a very unflattering stick-figure caricature of Rai with their mouth wide open, flailing their little arms in the air, steam coming out of their ears. A speech bubble reads: “WHIPPERSNAPPERS!” You stifle a laugh. It reminds you of when you were young, of simpler times with lesser cares. You wish you could go back there. But you also know that you belong right here, right now. You push the note back, and return your attention to the discussion at hand.

There’s still plenty of daylight left when the meeting concludes, hours later, with some things resolved and many left for a later date. You lace up your boots, grab your pack, and head back to work. Stronghold relies on you; you rely on Stronghold. You pat Witny on the back, just above their scavenger backpanel, the symbol to others that you belong to Stronghold. It tells enemies to steer clear, and tells the lost and needy that you just might be able to help them. Witny smiles, then masks up, drawing their handkerchief up over their nose. You follow suit and the two of you are off, the crunch of dirt beneath your feet.

DOIKAYT AND THE LIMITS OF THE ENCLAVE

SASHA MANNEQUIN

Much more so than by their shared game mechanics, Dream Askew and Dream Apart are tied together by their poignant exploration of separatism. The nameless shtetl of Dream Apart exists for a clear reason: Eastern European Jews were pushed to small towns like this one by Christians and generally forced to stay there. In the speculative future of Dream Askew however, the reasons behind the “queer enclave” are less clear. I find myself wondering, did Avery write the insular dynamics of the queer “community” into the future? Was she anticipating that a massive upheaval will bring new dangers to LGBT+ people, to the point where we need to cut off from the rest of society? Or is there something about us as gay and trans people which will always be fundamentally incompatible with the straight world?

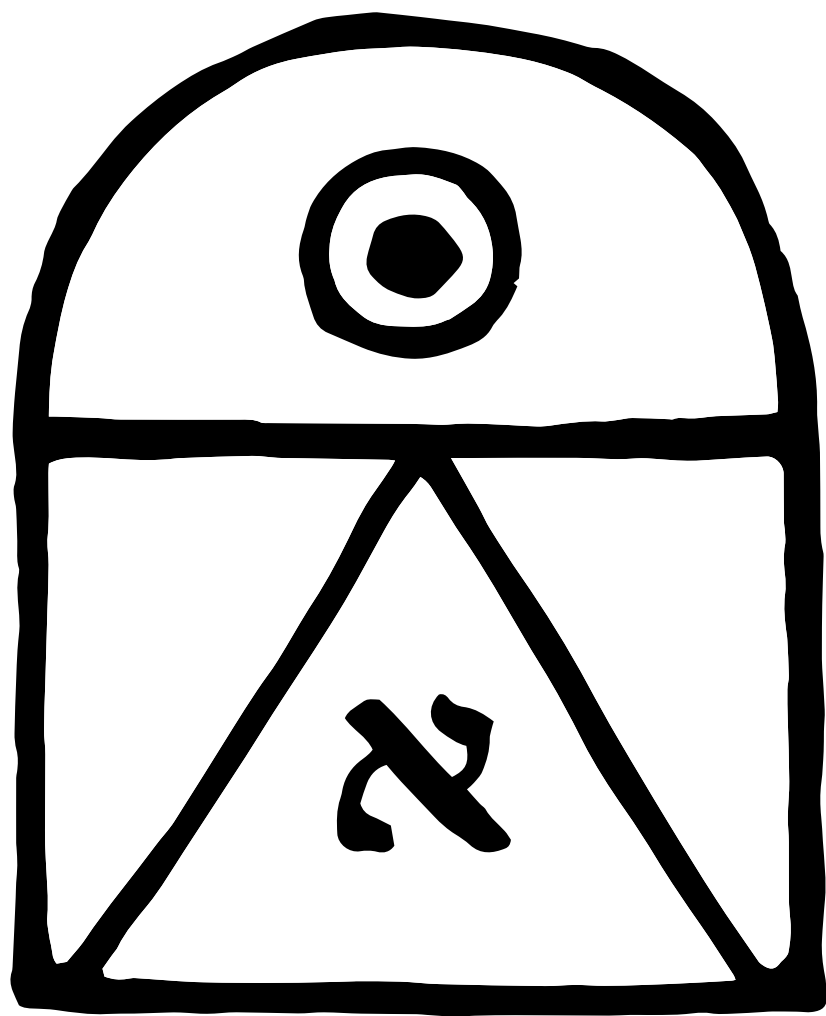
I could ask Avery what, if any, of these motives she was thinking of, but I think the answer we choose for ourselves is more important, because it’ll change how we play the game. A game of Dream Askew where we deeply believe in the queer enclave will take us to very different places than if we play a group of queers banded together for purely defensive reasons. These questions of purpose also effect whether I see the shtetl of Dream Apart with a longing and nostalgia or a hatred of the oppression and confinement that made these villages exist in the first place.

An idea that helps me see the incredible things we have created in the face of oppression, but resists the urge towards separatism, is the concept of Doikayt.

Doikayt means “here-ness” in Yiddish, and was theorized in the early 1900s by the socialist and secular Jewish Labour Bund as a counter to the fledgling Zionist movement. It means fighting the political struggles of the place you live, not disconnecting from the broader society. It means making connections with Goyim (non-Jews), and seeing the Jews of Europe as rooted in where they’ve lived for a thousand years, not as an inherently nomadic people. Doikayt is the opposite of separatism. But it also stands firmly opposed to assimilation.

It would be easy to apply Doikayt to Dream Apart, because that idea came from the same place, time and people as the game. But what if we apply Doikayt to Dream Askew? Could we challenge our instincts that we can’t successfully live beside people who don’t share our particular identities? That we’ll always be unsafe or at least unpalatable to the broader world? When Doikayt seeps its way into Dream Askew, playing (or encountering) the Society Intact or the Outlying Gangs becomes an opportunity to organize with them: to find a common enemy, or to work towards shared goals in spite of the danger to your group.

In a de-assimilated future, gay Jewish women blacken their teeth to impress lovers. Ancestral voices scream through the Physic Maelstrom, “we told you it would happen again,” and the gentle reply to the ancestors is: “despite our nightmares, we refuse to shut off from the world.”



DREAM APART

WHICH ONE?

ELLEN KUSHNER

My father wants me to be a scholar. That is what brings honor to a Jewish home, and to the whole family, living and dead, and of course, the future--if we even have one. We are all pretending all the time not to be scared that the goyim will come through our village with hatred and fire. Everyone knows it happens. Everyone has a way they think will make it not happen: *My cousin the innkeeper gives the [commandant] free mead to keep him sweet. The priest's daughter won't let anyone but my husband sew her clothes; would she let anything happen to us? They know we're honest people here. I know a soldier you can bribe with fresh eggs. My grandfather once did the count's mother a favor; he will not forget.*

But when you're a kid, you don't have any of that. You just have to hope the grownups will have enough to protect you. So when you dream, after the ninth or tenth time of blubbing in your mama's lap when you wake up, still trembling from the blood and flames, you learn to just shut up about it and tell yourself it hasn't happened yet, it's only a sending of the cruel spirits that haunt our sleep, it may never happen.

But even if they don't come to kill us all, what if they come and take me for a soldier? They do it all the time in Russia. They're called Nikolaievski Soldaten: Tsar Nikolas's Soldiers. Cantonists. They can take you when you're twelve, before you're even bar mitzvah. They won't let you have kosher food. All soldiers serve for twenty-five years. When you come back – if you come back – your family won't even recognize you. You speak Russian, and maybe you've forgotten all the prayers.

My big sister says they only come every four years, and mostly they take orphans and uneducated people. My friend Zalman says he heard of a boy, his mother cut off one of his fingers to make sure they wouldn't take him. I keep wondering, Which one?

AMARO AMAL, AVAKAI

CAREN GUSOFF SUMPTION

At the intersection of the wild forest and the gates to the unseen world, camps of Roma pass through, always on their way towards something. You might seek them out for adventure, for answers, or to locate something lost or forgotten.

Ask yourself, “Am I overlooking something of value or an opportunity?

Sar’shan, miro amal. Avakai, sit down, drink tea. Des duma Romany? No? Well then, I will speak what you speak.

Do not be afraid. The beasts that live among these trees, the ghosts in the darkness? We have an understanding. You are from the village? I cannot tell you where I have been as well as where I am going. You look backwards better than me, *miro amal*, backwards and inwards. If I do not look forward, I could break a wheel.

That is what you pay us for, correctly. We look forward. The future is not stone, though. It is crossroads and corners, egress and ingress. Opportunity, *miro amal*. Possibility. Do you want to see where you could go?

Some call us thieves. *So o Del dela*. We see what could be. Make something from nothing. There is value in everything until it turns to dust, and even then, we have the finest dust for the right buyer at the best price. Stop checking your pockets. It is all as you left it.

Oh, I look like the stranger who stole bread? Stealing bread, *shesti*. Who owns bread? If it does not feed someone, it is worth nothing anyway.

They also accuse us of stealing horses. Who owns a life? Who owns a sister or brother? Does your brother live in a little horse house and bear a plow, going over the same small field day after day? I did not think so. This dappled *grasni* looks like one from your neighbor? *Shesti!* She is *miro hej*; she would sleep in with us, could she fit.

Never mind the noise. I told you the monsters will stay away. You are safe here. We are alike, you and me. They say you denied him; they say our blacksmiths forged the nails. *Shesti*.

If you are still scared, we can sing. Romany do not suffer silently. We can fight if we have to, we sing when we can, but like the monsters you fear, we want only to come and to go in freedom.

The sun is setting. You must get back to your village, I understand. *Mishto sem. Devlesa, miro amal*. Though we will not be here tomorrow, I look forward to seeing you again.

ROMANY GLOSSARY

Amaro amal (AH-marow AH-ma): Our friend

Avakai (av-a-KEE): Come here

Sar'shan (SAR-shan): Hello

Miro amal (ME-row AH-ma): My friend

Des duma Romany? (Dez DOO-ma ROW-man-ee): Do you speak Romany?

Katar aves? (KA-tar AV-ess): Where are you from?

Ava (Ayuh): Yes

So o Del dela (S-oh DEL DEL-ah): lit. What God gives, God gives us everything

Shesti (SHESS-tee): Nonsense

Grasni (GRAZ-knee): Horse

Miro hej (Shay): My daughter

Mishto sem (MEESH-toe sem): Very well, all right

Devlesa: (DAVE-lay-sah): Good-bye (informal)

AVRUM

RABBI SONJA PILZ

One morning, he didn't get up. He did not change his underwear by swiftly moving into the neck opening of his *Tallit Katan*; he did not put on his *Kippah*, the small, black cap with which he would cover the top of his head; he did not wash his hands; neither did he say the blessings. He just lay there, looking at a small black crack in the wall right next to his pillow. He lay there, on his side, his arms wrapped around his knees, and in this position, he tried to ignore the pain in his stomach.

He had not slept, of course.

He usually did not sleep for at least half of the night – but this night, now that he thought about it, he did not remember sleeping at all. All he remembered seeing was this small black crack, slowly dissolving into the dark, and then reappearing again in front of his burning, red eyes and his clenched and tightly wound body.

These were his nights.

His name was Avrum – or, in the ancient Hebrew pattern, “Avraham ben Leibl,” “Avraham son of Leibl.” His teacher used to use the full name on happy occasions of which there had been fewer and fewer since the day that Benjamin had left. Avrum... he used to be a beloved student; a much sought-after study partner; a *Yeshivah Bokher* burning for the sea of *Torah* into which he was willing to throw himself; and a patient and *frum* teacher.

But he was tired. He had grown so tired. There was nothing waiting for him in the darkness of his room. He had tried to find something. He had tried to find the still, small void between the waves of words and the whisper between the pages. But there was nothing; and the endless sea of words and words had begun to terrify him. No prayer seemed long enough to pause it. But he had stopped praying anyways a long time ago, last summer,

when his younger brother Benjamin had disappeared, without a word, without a single sound, just like that. The void had swallowed him whole.

The rabbi had told him to cry. To rend his garments. To pray. To study. To spend more time with his students, the younger *Yeshivah* students, carefully dissecting the pages of *Talmud* for the sake of the Holy One.

"If the matter is as clear to you as the sun that the burglar has not come to you in peace, but that he might have come to kill you, then rise and kill him first...." (BT Sanhedrin 72a).

The rabbi had told him to wait. To sleep. To eat. Even to go into the woods and seek the loneliness there, as the filthy *Chassidim* would do. In the end, the rabbi had just looked at him. "Avrum, Avrum – where are you?" "I am not here. God is not here." "Avrum," the rabbi had said, "this is not about God. This is about the way we live."

He was still staring at the crack in the wall. This had to stop. This crack became wider, and nothing ever changed. He had to leave. The bundle under his bed has been ready for weeks. Today, we would not slip into his *Tallis*, today he would not put on his hat. Today he would take up the bundle and set off for Warsaw where the answers were waiting – the answers, and Benjamin, the brother who had stepped into the void.

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתּוֹלִיכֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וְתַצְעִידֵנוּ
לְשָׁלוֹם וְתַדְרִיכֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם...

Then he stopped, after the first words of the prayer for a journey; he stopped his tongue and his lips from moving and started to move his feet and his hands and he got up and took the bundle and climbed down the stairs and opened the door and left the house and closed the door behind him and left the yard. And there, he was on his way.

ADAM

JOSHUA A. C. NEWMAN

Adam blew into the village of Shibenoye with a balalaika on their back, a dented top hat on their head, and a shine in their eye that rivaled the evening stars that sparkled in the sky on that Rosh Chodesh. They stood in the door of the shul, open for the first warm spring breeze, leaning against the door while they listened to the Mussaf prayer, nodding along.

Though no one there knew the stranger, the men invited Adam to join them, recognizing their peiot, though some wondered at Adam's smooth chin — was this stranger old enough to join the minyan? They decided to accept Adam's assurance, and were rewarded with Adam's high, full-throated, beautiful singing.

Rivka, on the other side of the screen, heard the hesitation of the men and, with three of the other girls, peered through the cracks to see the source of the beautiful voice. When her eye alighted on Adam, it was met with a sparkling gaze in return. How could she even be noticed through the screen? But the smile certainly seemed like a smile for her, alone.

Rav Yosef should have been impressed with this stranger, bringing such kavanah to the normally dreary proceedings, but as the townsfolk left the shul for dinner, he approached Adam with suspicion. "Why do you come to our town, traveler?"

Adam laughed. "I didn't want to spend the night with a bear. They're warm, but don't count for a minyan."

"You came to Shibenoye to pray?" Asked Yosef, unable to keep the disbelief from his voice.

Adam smiled. "After a fashion."

Yosef wasn't satisfied, but didn't know what to say. Who was he, that he should banish a stranger from town when no wrong had been committed, other than disrupting the service with prayers that he might not have chosen, himself? He risked the contempt of the townsfolk, who had been showering welcomes on the newcomer.

The Rosh Chodesh meal was followed by the Birkat Hamazon, and Adam's balalaika spun from their back to add to it. But Adam didn't stop playing when the prayer was complete. Instead, they played harder, their voice filling the town with songs that inspired dancing and double-meaning rhymes that caused the couples to wink at each other and disappear to their homes.

Rivka, dancing with her sister Leah, caught Adam's eye, which seemed to have already been trained on her while their hands flew and voice soared.

When the dance ended, Rivka told Leah that she had to check on the chickens. Leah gave her the same wink Rivka had given her when Leah had snuck off after bedtime to meet with Moisheh. Leah turned toward home to convey her excuses to their parents. They'd never been found out before. Surely, this night was the one their skills had been honed for, however severe the consequences that adults hinted at.

Rivka made several discoveries that night. The first was that Adam had only eight fingers, four on each hand. It didn't look like they'd been lost like old Sol's, who'd lost one fighting for the Czar and loved to tell the tale. Instead, they were perfectly formed and beautiful. The second discovery was that they were soft and strong. The third was that Moisheh was also making discoveries tonight.

JEWISH WORKERS AND PEASANTS

★ RISE UP! ★

**THE SHETL IS OVERCROWDED!
THE TSAR BELIEVES HE OWNS US!**

*Fight for your rights as citizens, not
subjects! Fight for your rights as
producers, not slaves!*

*Fight for your place in the greater
empire as a free people!*

JOIN THE GENERAL JEWISH LABOR BUND IN LITHUANIA, POLAND, AND RUSSIA!

*Where once we were “cosmopolitan” we must now
form a nation of our own—a nation within nations, in
cooperation with the oppressed of the Empire. We must
join together and fight for a maximum program of our
national aspirations: language, culture, way of life!*

We are a nation, but not nationalists;
We are Jews, but we are secular;
and above all,
We are socialists!

*Our philosophy is Doikayt—here we stay, and here we
fight. There can be no exodus to Palestine. Unite and
strike against the bosses! Come together and shake off the
yoke of the rebbe, and join the autonomous militia!*

NICK MAMATAS