
Poems

Richard Fein

Yiddish

O Yiddish,
I felt your teeth
in my bones.
You cut into my childhood body
like the saw of a bungling magician
that bit through
the woman in the coffin.
Now I comb the stage
of the abandoned theater
for every splinter,
every chip I can lay my hands on.
Where are the bloodstains
that show the clumsy act was here?

It's good to know
you're good for nothing now,
except for the love I show you.
We could never have come together
if you were still teeming on the streets,
re-inventing yourself for textbooks,
commercials, psychotherapy.

You reach to me like a lover wanting
one more kiss.
How long it's taken for us to embrace,
for our tongues to find each other.

Just After Dawn

I woke to the murmur of my words.
Leaning against the headboard
I yielded to the words
that took me back
to my mother's slow death,
how I finally stopped wishing
I had a sister to take her off my hands,
how we worked through that long illness to embrace
and she called me *Ruvn. Ruvn.*
Then I remembered a pushcart
and that day in the wintry '30's
when she chatted with a bearded man in Yiddish
about the old country.
She reached into his pile
of hats and gloves,
pulled out a leathery cap,
fixed it squarely on my head,
looked at me and asked,
"Is it too tight
when you button the flaps?"
They settled on a price.
He put his rough hand on my head
and I flinched under his blessing.

Richard Fein's books include The Dance of Leah, Kafka's Ear, and At the Turkish Bath. His latest book of poems is entitled To Move into the House.