
Golem

Larry Oakner

for Rabbi Jeff Salkin

1

I heard this story was true
how Rabbi Loewe of Prague
took on the old lie: the Blood Libel,
thrown against the ghetto walls like red paint.
And when the lie had taken on a life of its own
enough to bring death into the shtetl,
the Rebbe climbed the wooden ladder,
like the angels in Jacob's dream,
ascending to the old synagogue attic
where amidst clouds of cobwebs and soot
he gathered dust with his hands and,
shaping the form of a man on the floor,
the Rabbi thumbnailed truth on the golem's brow
and the mannequin glowed with a plutonian half-life.

2

Every day I see a thousand golems
sleep walking, dumb as death
the truth written across their brows
where they can only see it on someone else.
There are truths to wake up to every day
if you know where to look:

The truth of my daughter patting
my leg as we sit together.
Truth is as small as a sparrow that appeared
in my son's bedroom, darting back and forth
before gathering the courage to fly out the open window.
If the difference between truth and death is life
then it is in my father's polished redwood casket
where I tucked my mother's goodbye note,
and, as well, in the miracle of her remission,
hair returning, luxuriant and silver.
Every morning I face the truth in my spit and image.
After someone dies, we cover the mirrors.

3.
After the golem had dumbly done its job,
the Rabbi rubbed out its life:
The difference between truth and death
is only a letter with no sound of its own
except the sound of the breath
which is life itself and the first flaming letter
of the seventy secret names of God.



Larry Oakner is a creative director for a corporate communications and marketing firm in New York and a Reform Jew from the mystical/rational school of Jewish thought. Most recently, his poetry has appeared in CCAR Journal, Mobius and Long Island Quarterly.

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