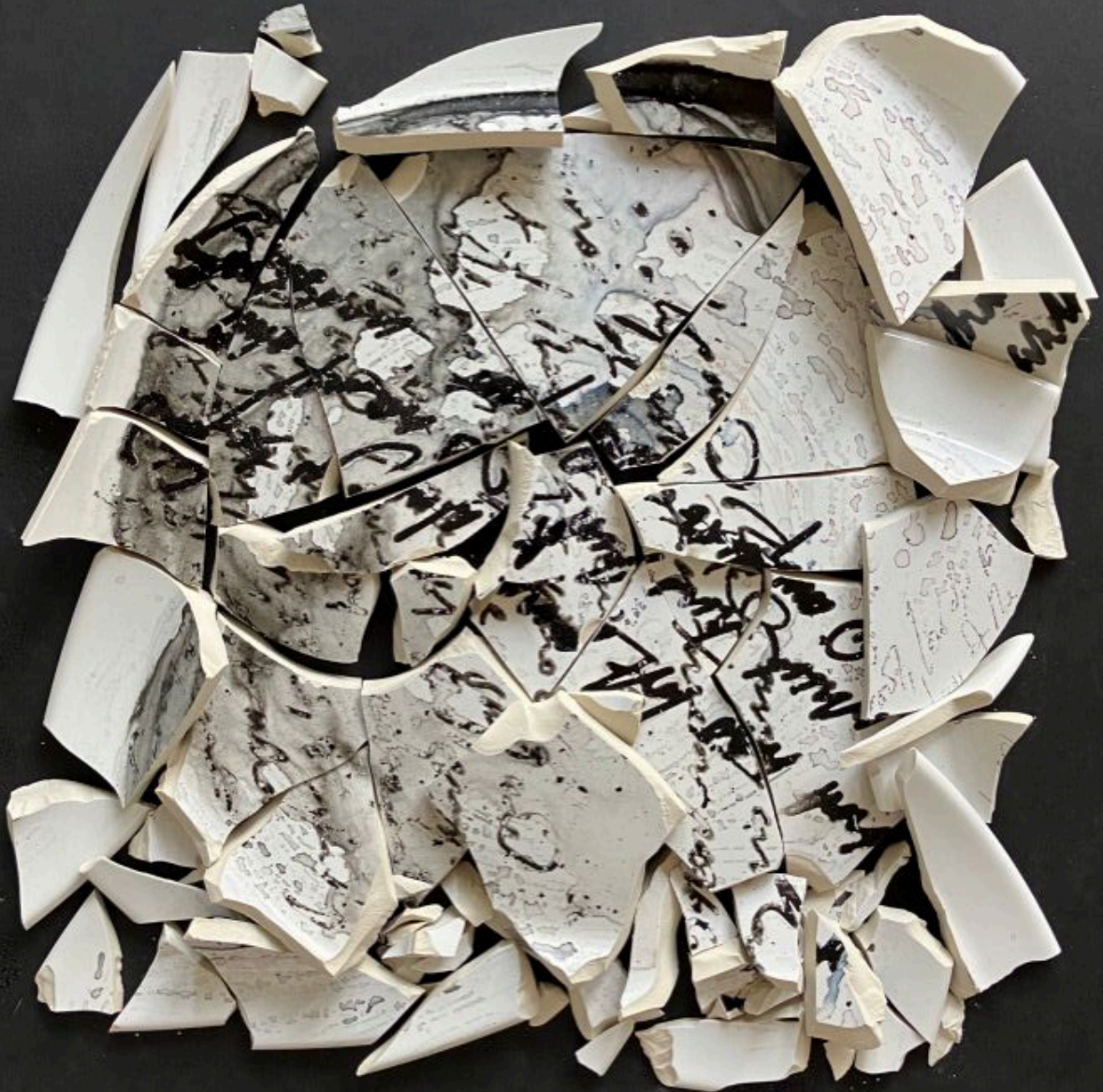


BALAGAN

A Magazine of Art, Poetry, and Perspective



SCARRED

JANUARY 2025, ISSUE NO. 1

Fragments of our *Scarred* State —
Exploring Diverse Voices
Shifting the Conversation

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Art by Batnativ HaKarmi

EDITORS' NOTE

Balagan is Hebrew slang for a state of chaos, disarray, and confusion. Its roots go back to the Yiddish *balagan*—a term for makeshift wagons carrying traveling performers. A fitting image: we are no longer travelers, yet chaos surrounds us.

After October 7th, we struggled to find words—to steady the wagon that felt impossible to control. We were censored, our language weaponized against us, our voices boycotted, our perspectives declared unwelcome. *BALAGAN* was born to fill that void.

In our inaugural issue, *Scarred*, we acknowledge our scars—the ones we know and the ones that linger hidden, still unseen. We face the scars in their absence: missing limbs, silenced voices, vanished presences. We felt the need to confront these scars—to recognize that our emerging identity is filtered through them.

The scars are us now.

In our first issue, read reflections from an American screenwriter and producer, an account of the Amsterdam pogrom by a Jewish school principal, and insights of the Israeli trauma expert who issued 'guidelines to therapists' the day after October 7th.

We write to understand; we write to think; we write to make sense of a world turned upside down.

BALAGAN offers diverse reflections from voices across the globe—each one reaching for words to express who we are now.

Scars and all.

Bill and Ronit

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BALAGAN

is a quarterly literary magazine—through poetry, art, and storytelling, we offer fresh perspectives on identity, culture and everything in between.

A Writing on the Wall publication - giving voice to the complex and layered realities of Israel today.

Writing on the Wall is a registered 501-3c non-profit.

STEPS TO FOLLOW IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY

Jane Medved

When the wind sounds like a siren, find a stairwell
Within a city, in the event, in the vicinity of pillars.
All loans are forgiven. Lie on the ground.
On TV they show how to tie a tourniquet.

In the event, within a city, or the vicinity of pillars
Place heavy objects at the entrance, a refrigerator,
While the TV is teaching how to tie a tourniquet.
Tools for self: defense, harm, wound, slow down.

Place heavy objects at the entrance, a refrigerator.
From behind, the side, zig zag when being shot at.
Don't slow down for defense, wound, harm, self.
Follow the procedures. Keep cell phones on silent.

From behind. From the side. Zig zag when shot at.
All loans are forgiven. Lie on the ground.
Follow the procedures. Cell phones on silent.
Not in the shower, or underneath a window.

Except in a ditch, or pulled out of a car.
Rocks, a metal buckle, if possible, a hand.
Keep silent in the shower. Find an inner stairwell.
The wind sounds like a siren, the motorcycle too.

REFLECTIONS ON TRAUMA & HEALING AFTER OCTOBER 7TH

Merav Roth

Since October 7th, I am no longer the same person. Or perhaps, I am more myself than I have ever been.

The profound rupture of that day—joined since by additional pain and existential and emotional challenges—has become an inseparable part of my being, much like the way I witnessed the Holocaust’s horrors fuse with my father’s soul, and later, in a more personal and subdued manner, the death of my sister with my own.

This journey began long before October 7th but seemed to lead inexorably to it—a journey against murderers and the murderous impulse, against division and the hatred of humanity in all its forms.

It has been a journey to ease the survivors’ guilt, to soften the grief of bereaved parents, siblings, and orphans—a dedication to repair, and to love, and to ethics as a force of healing.



Art by Daniella Meller

This commitment gained renewed urgency in the wake of the events of October 7th, and my journey took a new turn on October 8th. That day, in a Zoom meeting with therapists from the South, I presented “Ten Guiding Principles for Treating Survivors of October 7th.” The following day, I took those guidelines with me to the David Hotel by the Dead Sea, where, alongside wonderful colleagues, we established a therapeutic framework for the evacuees of Be’eri.

The voices, silences, and quiet weeping into long, shared embraces with those who arrived after a day or two, and beyond, will forever remain etched in our hearts. Those embraces carried the message: You are still alive. And also: So many of our loved ones are not, and we don’t even know if they were abducted or murdered, because they can’t yet be identified.

And there we were, as therapists, watching them, our hearts breaking with pain and the desperate wish to extend a hand. Breaking. Never before have I felt such an overwhelming desire to heal the suffering of others.

Yes, I am a sadder person. But I am also deeply moved by the tremendous goodwill and dedication being mobilized to help. I am awed by the commitment of the therapeutic community to the victims of October 7th and the war. In the first week of the war, when we reached out to the three psychoanalytic institutes to which we belong and asked, “Who is willing to volunteer to treat the victims of October 7th for free?” 450 psychoanalysts responded with a raised hand in our WhatsApp group, saying, “Here I am.”

It is profoundly moving. It is impressive. The drive for life stands firmly against the pull of death, striving for repair in the face of destruction.

Perhaps what has changed in me is that I am both a sadder person, with a heart broken daily by the direct encounters with victims of unimaginable human atrocities, and a more believing person—believing in the spirit of humanity, in its beauty, nobility, and goodness.

“The voices, silences, and quiet weeping into long, shared embraces with those who arrived after a day or two, and beyond, will forever remain etched in our hearts. Those embraces carried the message: You are still alive.”



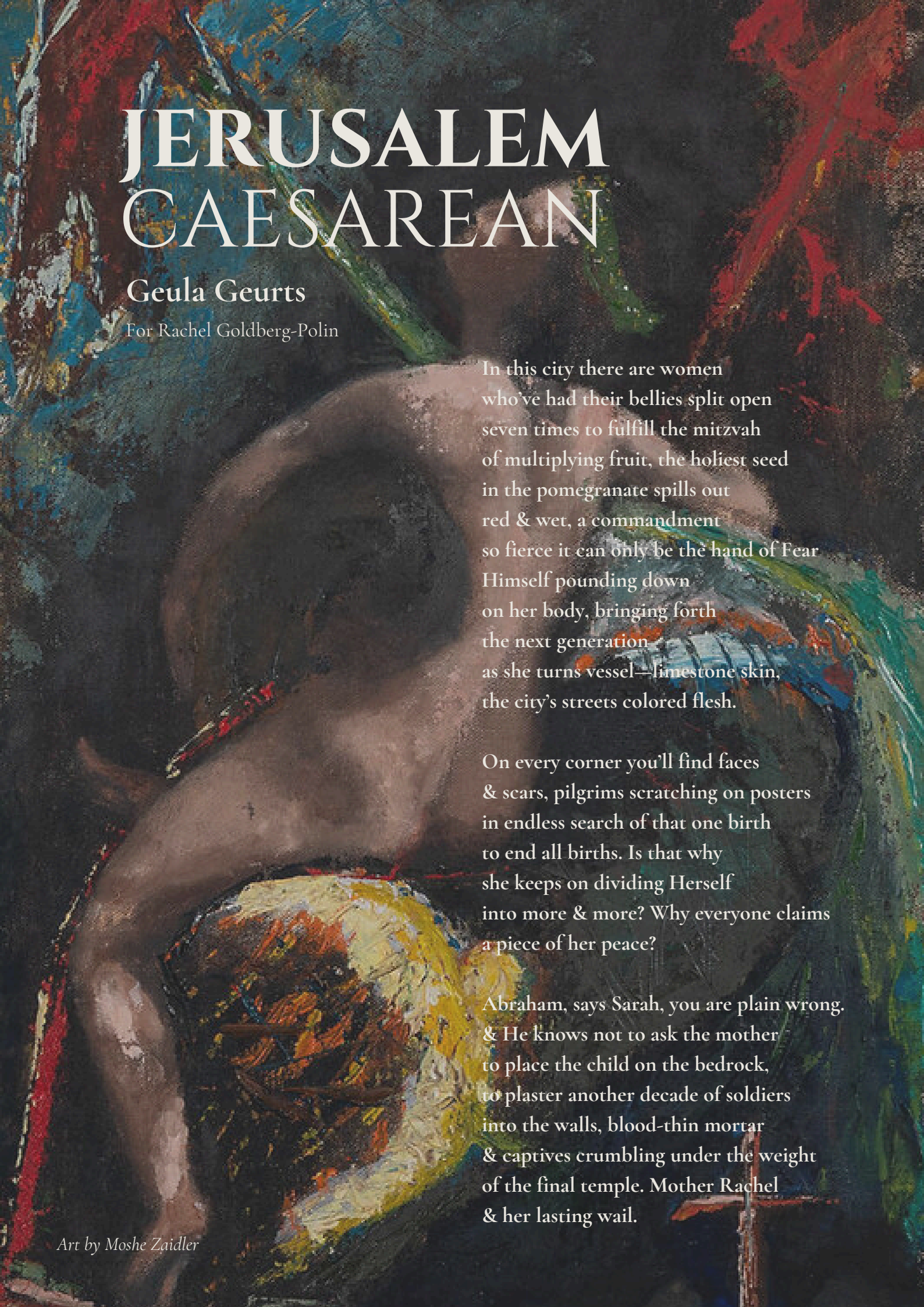
Facing radical evil, I hold on to radical good. Facing radical doubt, I hold on to radical faith. Facing radical despair, I hold on to radical hope. Facing radical hatred, I hold on to radical love. And then they hold on to me. I hope that we will all have the wisdom to choose good, faith, hope, and love, allowing them to become our tools for healing in the face of cruelty, hostility, contempt, division, and malignant consequences. I believe these values can also heal the profound grief and mourning that will accompany us and those we care for, for many years to come. We will not give up on their right, and ours, to rebuild meaningful and beautiful lives here once again.

And may we have the courage to look within ourselves and ask a bold, perhaps even audacious, yet deeply necessary question: how have we, each of us, contributed to the social crisis we live in—a crisis where each side harbors endless hostility and suspicion toward the other, convinced the other seeks to erase everything they hold dear in a spiral of paranoid, infinite repercussions? Let us also ask how, whether through silence or action, we have played a role in the disaster we live in, in this war-torn and conflicted region that stubbornly refuses to learn that the vicious cycles of death and bloodshed do not yield security and hope. I am certain we have the ability to change this. And I am even more certain that we must not give up on trying.

Our task now, as it has always been, is to restore the life drive. To recover the good, to resist the pull of death and destruction with all we can muster. If I am both a sadder and a more believing person, it is because I have seen how much can break and how much can be rebuilt.

As a nation, as individuals, as survivors, we are not only what has been destroyed. We are the repair, the belief, and the life that endures.

“Let us also ask how, whether through silence or action, we have played a role in the disaster we live in, in this war-torn and conflicted region that stubbornly refuses to learn that the vicious cycles of death and bloodshed do not yield security and hope.”



JERUSALEM CAESAREAN

Geula Geurts

For Rachel Goldberg-Polin

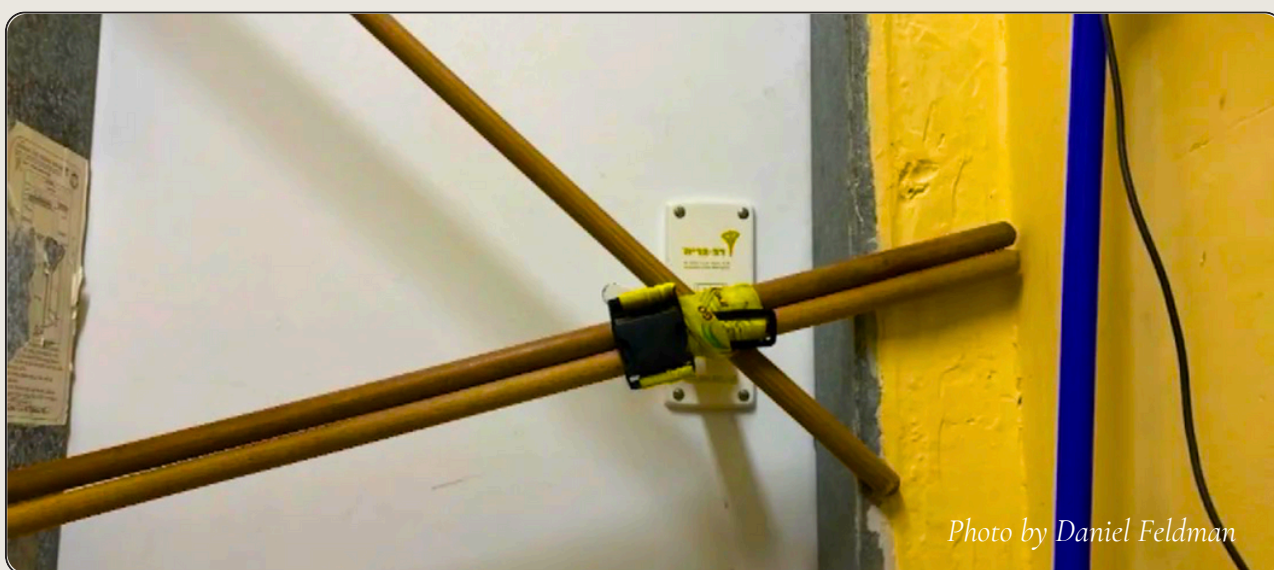
In this city there are women
who've had their bellies split open
seven times to fulfill the mitzvah
of multiplying fruit, the holiest seed
in the pomegranate spills out
red & wet, a commandment
so fierce it can only be the hand of Fear
Himself pounding down
on her body, bringing forth
the next generation
as she turns vessel—limestone skin,
the city's streets colored flesh.

On every corner you'll find faces
& scars, pilgrims scratching on posters
in endless search of that one birth
to end all births. Is that why
she keeps on dividing Herself
into more & more? Why everyone claims
a piece of her peace?

Abraham, says Sarah, you are plain wrong.
& He knows not to ask the mother
to place the child on the bedrock,
to plaster another decade of soldiers
into the walls, blood-thin mortar
& captives crumbling under the weight
of the final temple. Mother Rachel
& her lasting wail.

A HANDLE ON FEAR

Daniel Feldman



Following October 7, a Jerusalem carpenter produced wooden crossbars to secure residential safe rooms from terrorist invasion. Panicked Israelis ordered them in droves.

Crowding in bunkers turned into death traps. Silently hiding in wardrobes or under beds. Playing dead under a piles of corpses in order to survive. For many Jews—or anyone with a sensitivity to Holocaust memory—it was not hard to feel the reverberations of the past rumbling back to life on October 7. Memories that had scarred over were sliced open. Historical associations came rushing back, and this time with ghoulish GoPro footage. At least the Nazis avoided visual documentation of their atrocities. Not so with Hamas.

The massacre was a threshold event between our past, present, and uncertain future. Feelings that we considered consigned to the past came pouring back. For me, it was the door handles that did it, specifically the handles to safe room doors that Kibbutz members spent hours holding or securing as their homes were attacked by murderers.

The Mamad, or residential safe room, is a ubiquitous feature of Israeli homes. It is designed to protect inhabitants from rocket or missile attack, not from terrorists in the living room. Until October 7, they were not meant to lock. No one ever thought they should. When the killing squads

from Gaza arrived, some panicked Kibbutz residents improvised solutions to hold their doors shut. Others simply held the handle. Rachel Elgarat Dancyg, a 71-year-old grandmother who sheltered with two granddaughters in Kibbutz Nir Oz, held fast to the handle of her Mamad door as her home was infiltrated. She did not relax her grip. Terrorists struggled to open the handle and shot through the door; a bullet passed right next to Rachel's abdomen. But she held on. After securing the handle for eight hours of heroic vigilance, she saved herself and her granddaughters. In nearby houses the door was breached. Rachel's brother Itzik Elgarat and ex-husband Alex Dancer, also residents of Nir Oz, were taken hostage. Alex, the finest teacher of the Holocaust whom I ever met, was executed by Hamas in captivity. He was aged 75 and grandfather to the teen girls saved by Rachel. His body was recovered from a tunnel under Khan Younis and buried in August in Israel.



Photo by Irit Lahav

“When I arrived to pick up the delivery, I was dumbstruck that the carpenter had written names on every crossbar, since each was cut to size. Each of us had a bar with our name on it and we would use it to handle our fears.”

Residents of the communities under attack on October 7 improvised home barricades to keep their safe room doors shut during the invasion.

In the shellshocked days after the massacre, panic broke out among my neighbors in Jerusalem. Many were terrified about the unlocked Mamad doors in our homes. Rumor spread that a local carpenter was making a wooden crossbar that could be fitted to a Mamad door handle to prevent it from opening. One neighbor organized a group order of dozens but had no way to have them delivered. I volunteered.

Although I thought it superfluous—no comparable attack on homes in Jerusalem will ever occur — I thought it worthwhile to do what I could to allay mass fear. When I arrived to pick up the delivery, I was dumbstruck that the carpenter had written names on every crossbar, since each was cut to size. Each of us had a bar with our name on it and we would use it to handle our fears.

Alex Dancyg specialized in teaching Holocaust history in Polish, his mother tongue. And it is in Polish that Ida Fink, perhaps the finest author of Holocaust short fiction, wrote a devastating short story regarding door handles during the Shoah. “Drzazga” or “Splinter” is about a teenager whose mother saved him from the Nazis by hiding him behind a door. It ends:

‘Wiesz, kiedy matka przycisnęła mnie skrzydłem drzwi do ściany, ja nie wiadomo kiedy chwyciłem ręką klamkę i trzymałem ją mocno, choć i bez mej pomocy byłyby się nie zamknęły ... Dużo bym dał, by zmyć z siebie pamięć o tej klamce.’

‘You know, when my mother pressed me against the wall behind the door, I grabbed the handle and held it tight, even though it wouldn’t have closed without my help ... I would give a lot to let go of the memory of that handle.’ For us, times change but the story stays the same.’

We thought we had a handle on Jewish memory, but the past has gotten hold of us. We may never again be able to let it go.



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A painting of a white goat on a tree branch. The background is a vibrant green with numerous red splatters, resembling blood. The goat is positioned on a light brown, textured branch that curves from the top left towards the bottom right. The overall style is expressive and somewhat abstract.

LEMON HARVEST IN WAR

Alden Solovy

Thin trails of blood
Crisscross my arms.
Lemon trees have thorns,
But I do not wear a long sleeve shirt.
For the harvest,
And my gloves do nothing
Against the sudden
Needle pricks
On my fingers.

So many lemons hide
In the tangle of branches
Which must be moved
To see deep inside the tree,
Or lifted to find
The fruit hidden beneath.
Coaxing branches aside,
I move inch by inch
Into the thickness of thorns
And boughs
To reach the trunk,
To be held by the limbs,
Lifted by the force of life,
Comforted by the scent
Of growth and purpose.

The air raid siren
Rumbles across the open field
Into the orchard.
Explosions echo in the sky.
I lay flat on the ground,
Beneath my tree,
Feeding the roots
With drops of blood
And silent tears.

SCARRED AND SCARED

Howard Gordon

My wife and I raised our three children in a largely secular community in Los Angeles. We tried communicating to them how central being Jewish was to us by lighting candles on Shabbat, becoming active synagogue members, and making mandatory their (admittedly minimal) Hebrew and religious school education. Still, when my daughter was eleven, she told me that for her “life is a puzzle and the Judaism piece doesn’t fit.”

I struggled for a moment how best to respond. I told her that being a Jew was the most important part of who I am but couldn’t quite tell her exactly *why*. She looked at me blankly, unmoved. So I tried again. I told her our tradition was less about answers, and more about cultivating the ability to ask important questions. Again, a mostly blank look from my daughter. I was quickly losing her attention. Desperate, I settled on a metaphor.

I admitted I wasn’t quite sure what to tell her except that for me, being a Jew was like being admitted into a three-thousand-year-old garden. Because the garden is so overgrown, you can only see a few feet ahead as you try to navigate a path through it. Sometimes you get scratched by a thorn, but other times you’ll come upon something breathtakingly beautiful. I told her how grateful I was to be in that garden, and how responsible I felt for tending the garden while I was alive—so that she could find her path through that same garden. And that more than anything, I would be devastated if that ancient garden died on my watch.

I’m not sure if my metaphor actually moved her or just made her feel guilty, but she agreed at least to keep trying to fit that puzzle piece into her life. Nothing over the past sixteen years has anchored her Jewish identity more powerfully than what happened on October 7th—and what has happened ever since. She recently hosted a shabbat dinner for some friends during which she recited the names of the hostages. My daughter is scarred and scared—but she also appreciates how sacred her stewardship of that ancient garden is; how *our* story is *her* story, too.

ONE SCHNITZEL AWAY

Ronit Eitan

The freezer door opens, and the cool air hits me in the face, giving a momentary reprieve from August's unbearable humidity. I reach and pull out the red plastic container full of panko breadcrumbs that sits crammed at the back. Although a sizeable container, it is surprisingly light in weight.

On the counter, three large soup bowls wait. My designated schnitzel bowls, a role they had successfully fulfilled since they were "babies"—deep enough for the chicken to be fully submerged within their parameters, but not too deep so that I can't easily fish the cutlets out, with little effort, to the next bowl. Anyone who has ever made schnitzels knows that once you find the perfect schnitzel bowls, they become your schnitzel bowls forever.

"Hi *Ima*," I say, getting everything ready. The phone sits on the counter; I have my earbuds on, the Bluetooth fully activated.

I fill the first bowl with an airy mountain of all-purpose flour and move half a step to the left. I crack two large eggs into the second bowl, splash some cold milk in, and whisk vigorously with a fork, creating an emulsified concoction that rests between a liquid and a glue. Satisfied, half a step later, I tilt the red container, filling the last bowl with the cold beige panko crumbs. A tablespoon of sweet paprika goes into the breadcrumbs, and with a different fork, I swirl the spice in with intention. The little burgundy specks will ensure the desired brown color once fried. Everyone has their own special schnitzel trick.

When I was in my twenties, we held a schnitzel competition, thinking we were so cool with our childish challenges in an adult form. Entries varied: lemon zest, a teaspoon of grainy mustard in the egg mixture, white sesame seeds or even cornflakes in the breadcrumbs, or a sprinkling of onion powder or a garlic granule in the flour. For such a straightforward and humble dish, the amount of personal tweaking it could evoke was astounding.

"I'm making lunch for the kids," I say while separating the thin, pre-cut chicken cutlets, peeling each slice from the clear plastic dividers. I paid extra for that pleasure, uninterested

in cutting and pounding them like I normally would. I'm not in the mood.

"Yes, well I only have six bottles of mineral water," I say while dipping the first light-pink chicken flesh in the flour mixture, lifting it, shaking off excess flour as it catches air. One at a time. I'm not one of those people who dips them all in flour at once. Patience makes for a great schnitzel.



The sound of an ambulance siren outside filters through the house. My heart speeds up. They should change that sound; it's too much like a bomb siren. I dip the chicken cutlet in the flour bowl again. Both sides need to be covered, if even a centimeter is exposed the coating will fall out, creating an island of barren coating.

"Yes, I know it's not enough. I was at the supermarket, and they ran out of water, everyone is panicking," I say.

After my unsuccessful venture at the supermarket, I spent my morning filling containers with tap water. Mason jars, glass pitchers, vintage vases for flowers—all had become emergency water vessels should an attack occur. I resisted filling my Tupperware with water. Barely. We will not die from thirst.

"Just because the taxi driver said we will be attacked this Sunday, it doesn't mean that it will happen this Sunday, *Ima*," I say as I submerge the cutlet in the egg mixture. The pale-yellow color, like lemon chiffon, swallows the cutlet whole. I make sure to do this with my fork so

as not to have direct physical contact.

“Yes, Ima, the shoes are also next to the door, like always,” I say. My eyes drift to the pile of shoes—the ones we put on quickly when a siren is on to rush to the bomb shelter. My eight-year-old’s bright pink Crocs, my twelve-year-old’s black sneakers, teenage phase activated, and my own fashionable ones, maroon oxfords with slight heels. A fashion stylist with a young child from the next building joins our bomb shelter on a regular basis, her casual “miklat look” perfected. I wish she would move away. I don’t need that kind of pressure in my miklat as well.

“Let me talk to *Aba*,” I say, sticking my fork deep in the flesh—four markings, deep holes in an otherwise smooth canvas, securing my hold. I lift the cutlet from the egg, watching the string of liquid that stretches from the cutlet to the bowl, like a tail, unwilling to detach itself completely. I force it into the breadcrumbs with a plop.

“I am thinking about buying a generator,” I say to my dad. The cutlet disappears in the bowl. I press it down with my fingers. Hard. Flip. Press hard again with my knuckle this time. It becomes one with its surroundings, camouflaging itself in the sea of grains.

I layer the uncooked schnitzel on a clean plate. On to the next. One on top of another. My fingers accumulate clusters of breadcrumbs like tiny chicken nuggets. I rinse them under cold water.

“*Walla?* Huh... I thought a generator was like a giant battery. I guess I will have no use for it in a fuel shortage. You just saved me four thousand shekels.”

I have ten memorial candles somewhere around the house I can use if my power shuts off, hoping they are not a foreboding metaphor for the future.

“Okay, *Aba*, the kids are hungry, I’ll talk to you later,” I say, pressing my left ear to disconnect. I sometimes press the wrong ear; the volume goes up.

I place a large nonstick pan over medium-high heat. Pouring the pale corn oil, it coats the bottom layer, a good three centimeters deep. Shallow frying is the key.

I wait, restless. It must get to the right temperature, I chide myself. If I get too impatient, the schnitzel will absorb the oil instead of using it to crisp up. I snip a piece of a schnitzel and drop it into the hot oil, testing out the temperature. The chicken sizzles, rising to the top. It’s time. I lift them one by one, dropping them in, enjoying the hissing sound. Like a puzzle, I maneuver them in the pan. How many can I fit in?

Getting impatient, I turn one in the pan. The color isn’t right—it should be amber brown, not this straw color. More time needed. I place layers of toilet paper on a different plate,

since I am out of paper towels, to absorb the excess oil once they are done. Tiny bubbles surround the schnitzels, and the smell of fried food drifts from the kitchen to other rooms in the house. Soon, my kids will be lured; that sense memory will linger in their psyche long after I'm gone.

Once the first round is ready, I observe the oil, specked with burned breadcrumbs left behind. I bring the first pile of schnitzels and place them in the middle of the large wooden dining room table. White rice and a chopped cucumber and tomato salad that nobody eats but me are there.

"Food!" I yell. They are home; I want them all nearby. My children and my schnitzels.

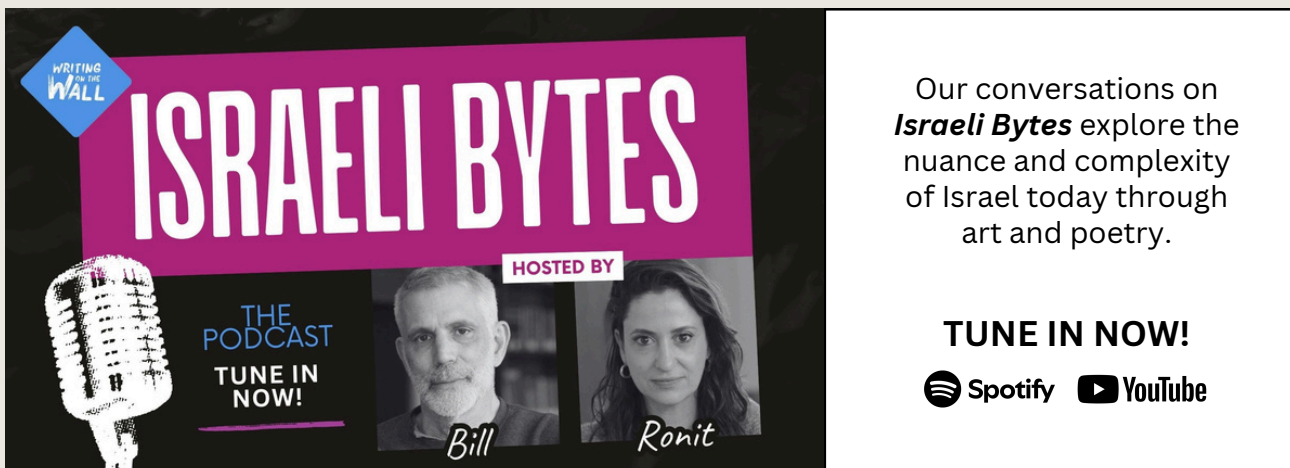
They emerge from their rooms and sit at the table, each grabbing a few schnitzels. "That's not everything. I am frying more," I say. I can't eat.

"You want me to cut the schnitzel for you?" I ask my youngest.

She nods, fully focused on her phone. I allow it. No news, just mindless cartoons.

I take her plate to the kitchen, debating which knife to use. On Oct. 7, I counted the knives in my kitchen drawers. I had three butcher knives, ten butter knives, and a bread knife that I could use as a chainsaw. I use that one to cut the schnitzel into tiny bite-sized pieces.

I return and put the plate in front of her, then turn around and go back to the kitchen. With a spider, I weave out the burned breadcrumbs, discarding them in the trash. I turn on the gas, and pour more oil into the pan, watching, waiting for it to get back to temperature. I count my knives again. The newest addition, a small tourné knife, used to cut little strings of cucumber to adorn my favorite Vietnamese salad once upon a time, before the war, might be useful to take out a terrorist's eye if another invasion occurs. The schnitzels, one by one, go in. I push each around, trying to form a different puzzle.



WRITING ON THE WALL

ISRAELI BYTES



HOSTED BY

THE PODCAST
TUNE IN NOW!

Bill Ronit

Our conversations on **Israeli Bytes** explore the nuance and complexity of Israel today through art and poetry.

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JUST IN CASE

Jane Schapiro

Even my father, the optimist, harbored a just-in-case.
He never let on, but after his death
my sisters and I found gold coins in his drawer.
We never knew he had a just-in-case,
had inherited the dread of pogroms and camps
from his parents, their parents,
on down the line.

We divided the coins for our own just-in-case:
a source for escape should hatred explode.
Months can pass and I forget the stash,
but last night, after listening to a victim's account,
how she and her girlfriends, high on drugs,
had been dancing to a D.J. on a Negev field,
just dancing arm-in-arm
in a percussive daze,
boundless, whole

when the sky split as the sun rose,
and missiles and bullets tore through the dark
and gunmen burst from behind barbed wire
dissolving the ground to a swamp of blood,
how she escaped but not her friend—
when she finished her story, a man raised his hand,
“why were you dancing so close to the line?”—
I counted my coins.

MY OCTOBER 7TH DIVORCE

Jonathan Papernick

It might have been when she complained about the engagement ring you surprised her with on Valentine's Day, saying the stone was the wrong color—You know I don't like pink.

Maybe it was later when she told friends you never actually proposed, you just shoved a ring into her hand.

It might have been when your father said, Are you sure you want to marry her? Are you absolutely sure?

It might have been then.

It might have been when she told you her dad would have liked you if he was still around. He would've called you a kike, but he would've liked you because you're smart.

It might have been then.

It might have been when she kept texting that guy she slept with before you were "official."

Or when he sent flowers to her at your new home when you moved in together.

Or when he private messaged you on Facebook saying you are a good writer.

It might have been then.

It might have been when she talked about her ex-husband who wouldn't speak to her anymore, how she talked about him every day, sometimes every hour, so much so that you knew the events of his life better than you knew anyone outside your immediate family. You knew he had a radio show in college in Indiana and was friendly with Bubba the Love Sponge. You knew it took him two years to tell her he loved her and wouldn't marry her until she paid off her credit card debt. You knew he always had to be the smartest person in the room. You knew that he wouldn't wash his face at night because there was no actual dirt on it and sometimes he wore the same underwear two days in a row, and that she would never have sex with him unless he brushed his teeth first.

It might have been then, or then or then or then.

And when you fell asleep on his side of the bed in the bed that he had actually slept in, he was there with you, the impression of his sleeping body, just beneath the thin fitted sheet.

Maybe it was when she would go to sleep before you and never leave a light on, or every morning when you woke, her side of the bed empty and cold as ice.

She wouldn't snuggle in bed. Ever. Sleepy time is sleepy time.

But she was your wife, so you accepted it all.

Because you thought love is acceptance.

It might have been the door slamming and the screaming because you couldn't fold her laundry the way she liked it, her sports bras and silky camisoles following no recognizable geometric pattern.

And when you said you were doing your best, she called it weaponized incompetence, angry foam spraying from her mouth.

It might have been then.

When you said your eyes hurt or your head throbbed after you'd hit it on something or the chemicals in your synthetic carpet made you feel sick she told you to suck it up.

It might have been when you told her she'd need to call your ex-wife if you died so you could have a proper Jewish burial because you sure as shit didn't want to be cremated like she did.

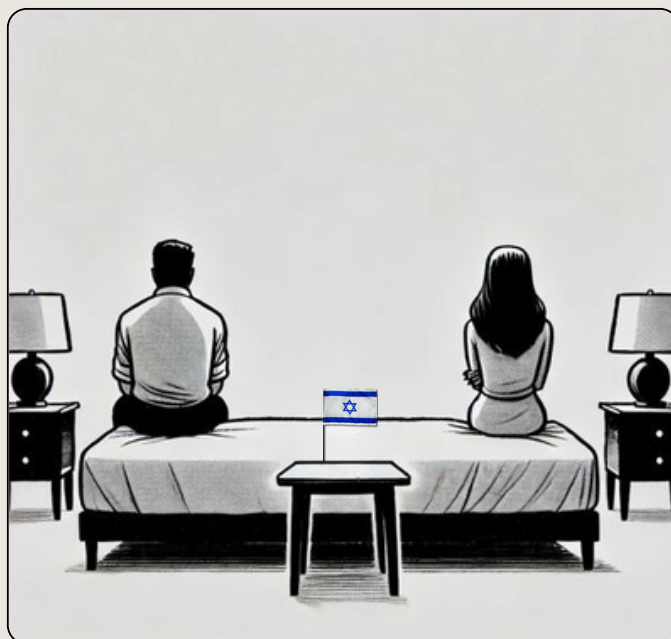
It might have been when she said if you ever go to jail, I'd leave you.

And when you asked her, why would I ever go to jail, she made a face as if she really thought that was a possibility.

Or when she "joked" when we get divorced... and you told her to stop because it upset you and she kept saying it because she thought it was funny.

But this is when it happened:

Just a few days after the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, 1200 dead and more than 200 taken hostage by genocidal terrorists who raped and burned and tortured their victims with ecstatic joy, recording everything on their GoPros to memorialize their infamy and to spread the terror, you had gone for cocktails at a hip little speakeasy with her and her eldest



daughter who had just turned 21.

You were hurting so bad and were ready to drink yourself into oblivion, an ancient tribal fear stirred up, generational trauma so palpable you dreamt they were in your room with you while you slept, chants of Allahu Akbar, jolting you awake.

Your stepdaughter added a Palestinian flag to her Facebook profile, the pantomime of virtue signaling on proud display just like when she posted the yellow and blue of the Ukrainian flag or the words Black Lives Matter next to her smiling face.

But this was a killing blow. Because you thought you were family.

When you tried to explain to your stepdaughter that no, Israel wasn't committing genocide, and that no, Israel was not a settler colonial state, she wouldn't hear it, like a little child plugging her ears going la la la la la, telling you her Palestinian adjunct professor told her that horrible day was justified resistance, and she didn't want to hear any more because she trusted her professor more than she trusted you.

When you tried to make a logical case from the heart, your own pain cracking your voice with the strain of it, her face went blank and she turned away, and your wife, as angry as you had ever seen her said, You will never talk to her about this ever again.

That was when.

But also, when you asked her to join you at a vigil for the hostages at a local synagogue, where friends of the victims would be speaking she said no, and you went alone.

The whole world was falling apart, and as surprising as it all was, it felt also inevitable, as if you'd been waiting for this moment your whole life, for history to catch up and grab you.

Looking back it seems so easy, none of this should have ever happened, but it did because you believed you could make it work, despite everything.

In the end, you weren't the one to call it off.

You weren't the one to ask for the divorce.

You would have stayed with her for decades more, until your body failed and your vision faded and your hearing shut down and only she remained because that's what you thought love meant.



OCTOBER WORDS

Eve Grubin

I try to speak slant
or bright.

My words meet triangles
of fire, thrown.

Meanings I make
disintegrate.

I try to speak slant
or bright.

If I say... pogrom, the turning begins...

I become mute.

I must not say, I cannot name...
So many words can't be said.

No matter what, the mere fact
of saying censors.

I try to speak slant
or bright.

Sentences turn in my mind:

*You are coming into us who cannot withstand you
you are coming into us who never wanted to withstand you
you are taking parts of us into places never planned
you are going far away with pieces of our lives*

Searching for language, words hurt.

The word seventh bruises.

Music and festival are tremors in my hand.

We never wanted to bear this.

I try to speak slant
or bright.

Knives between.

Parts torn.

Confusion at the glee.

The words don't translate.

I try to speak slant
or bright.

ECHOES OF HISTORY

Jael de Jong Weissman

On the evening of November 7th, as I approached the Portuguese Synagogue for the Kristallnacht commemoration, I passed the Dockworker statue commemorating the “February strike” of 1941. Its towering presence seemed to speak through time: “In your darkest moments, when the Nazis stormed Jewish neighborhoods, beating, shooting, and terrorizing defenseless men, women, and children during the first *razzia* in these very streets of Amsterdam, we rose against your oppressors on your behalf.” This act of solidarity stands as the only mass protest of its kind in occupied Europe.

The grand Portuguese Synagogue remains exactly as it was in the 17th century. Instead of electric lights, the synagogue is illuminated by the warm glow of hundreds of candles. Outside, military police, local law enforcement, and additional security stood vigilant, as the sound of police sirens served as a prophetic backdrop to the solemn and reflective speeches on healing a fractured world.

After the Kristallnacht commemoration, we went home while on the other side of the city people made their way to the stadium for the Maccabi Tel Aviv vs. Ajax Amsterdam football match. Ajax, and Maccabi supporters happily celebrated together as Ajax won, a moment of joy before Amsterdam would tragically become the stage for actions reminiscent of its darkest days.

In the early morning hours, phones rang urgently across the city. The Jewish community was woken up by alarmed friends and family, urging them to get up immediately; something terrible was unfolding. Checking my phone, I saw videos of Jews ambushed and chased through the city, beaten up mercilessly and run over by cars.

The images were all too familiar, the stills black and white that we grew up with, had come to life in full color. We discovered that terrified Israelis hid in their hotel rooms, their doors pounded upon after their locations were betrayed by hotel staff. In the city where Anne

Frank hid, and was eventually betrayed, the echoes of history felt unbearably close.

In no time, the Jewish community mobilised and started a rescue operation. Outside of the city center an emergency shelter was established by Maccabi NL, and many volunteers spent the night tirelessly driving back and forth to the city, searching for Israelis to evacuate to safety after it became clear that taxi drivers using their professional network played a key role in carrying out the attacks.

It was still dark when at 6:30 in the morning, I sent what will most likely remain the most surreal text in my professional life to a colleague at the university: “I can’t make our appointment today, there was a pogrom in Amsterdam....” I reread the text because I could hardly process what I had just typed and then I hit ‘send’—there was no time to process.

Along with the rescue operation came the assessment of the safety of the Jewish community in Amsterdam that morning. Were the streets safe? Was it safe for the children to go to school?

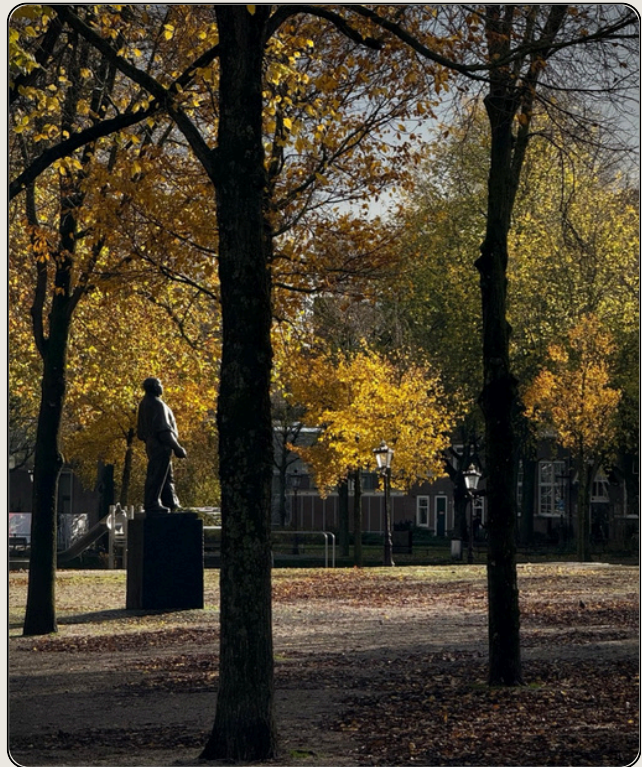
At 07:11 a text read:

“Do we still want to stay in Amsterdam?”

I answered:

“We are not going anywhere.”

While our collective intergenerational trauma was triggered, something else had been awakened in the early morning following November 7th: our collective intergenerational resilience. As dawn broke, the Amsterdam Jewish community stood - like the Dockworker - tall in defiance, living testaments to resilience and hope, unbowed, unbroken, and unwavering, a light unto the nations even in the darkest of times.



Dockworker statue in Amsterdam



PILGRIMAGE

Maxim D. Shrayer

Old virile German men and women come to the Holy Land in early November, warm their bones at the edge of the Dead Sea, admire Jacques Offenbach at the Israeli Opera, and sigh with bravura over their long lost youth right at the entrance to Yad Vashem.

Old sentimental Austrian men and women come to the Holy Land in the middle of April, sip cloudy cappuccinos at Landwer Café, founded by Viennese refugees, unveil their bulging veins on Bograshov Beach at noon, buy cheap antiquities at the flea market in Old Jaffa.

Old Jewish-Russian men and women don't come to the Holy Land in the fall or the spring, don't drink bitter vodka at Viking Restaurant on Ben Yehuda, don't listen to runaway poets at Babel Bookstore on Allenby, don't drag their heavy feet over the pouty stones of Jerusalem,

because old Russian men and women
have already died or haven't yet been resurrected,
because old Jewish men and women
have already been resurrected or haven't yet died.

JACOB'S SCAR

William Kolbrener

I was born the most privileged Jew in 2000 years.

With the rest of the Roslyn High School class of '79, I missed out on pogroms, persecution, and holocaust. Instead, I got degrees from Columbia and Oxford, and became an English professor in Israel. Velvel, my maternal great-grandfather from Govorovo, a shtetl in Poland, would have been certain the Messiah had arrived. That is, before he, his wife, and most of his family were rounded up and slaughtered by Nazis in the town synagogue.

My mother led the conspiracy of denial around the family scar, her secret, to protect us—me, my brother and sister—from the poverty and religion of Europe, but mostly, death. Not the Mercedes 280SL convertible, nor the Sunday brunches at Engineer's Golf and Country Club, nor the wads of dollars pressed into my father's billfold, could staunch the blood of my mother's silence.

In Sunday School, Holocaust education *protected* us from memories. In Temple Sinai, we watched the movie version of Elie Wiesel's *Night* and sang Israeli folk songs. Down the block, Marvin, the owner of Andel's Appetizing Store, had numbers etched into his arm.

On October 7th, the wound gushed death. The scars of my ancestors—dead great-grandparents, seven great aunts and uncles—burst forth with the blood of the children of Nova. On October 7th, the wound gushed out blood and death. I discovered, after 30 years in Israel, 15 years in yeshiva, I understood, without words, what it means to be a Jew—to be scarred.

My trauma was to believe, in the idealism of my extended youth, that the scar of Jewish history—like Marvin's tattooed numbers—could be erased; that I might become what my mother pretended to be: *unscarred*. In fifth grade, my 'autobiography' was an advertisement for this fantasy. Photos mounted on colored paper, the cover bore a title chosen by my mother: *Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries*. I wanted to believe it, and I mostly did. But the scar, unspoken and unnamed, remained.

I left Roslyn searching for words to make sense of my scar. At Columbia, I encountered Homer's scarred Odysseus; a lifetime later, in Israel, the scarred Jacob of Genesis. Odysseus lives out the fate of his name and becomes *himself*, the scarred man. Jacob's scar brings a new name, Israel and a new identity, to which he aspires, but will never fully become. Rembrandt's 'Jacob and the Angel' shows the scar as an act of love. Unlike Odysseus's, Jacob's wound of love has a future.

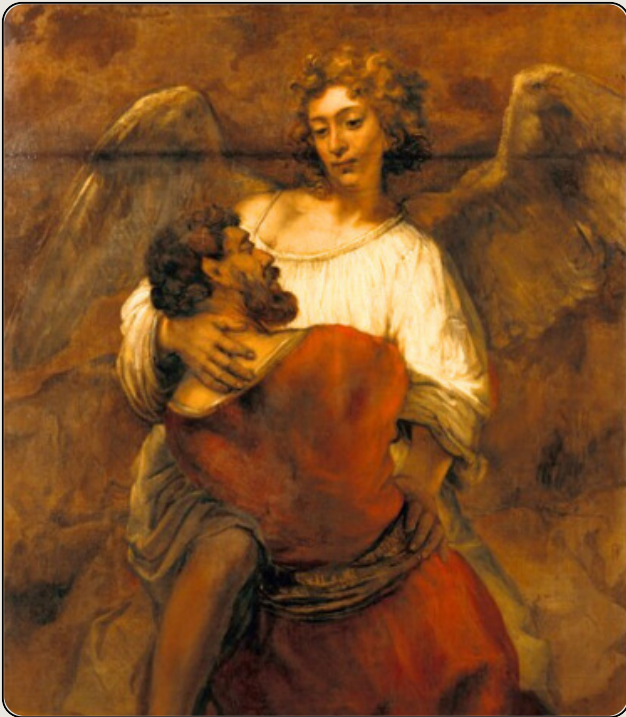
In the *Odyssey*, Homer interrupts the accidental revelation of his hero's identity with the most famous flashback in world literature. As the old nurse bathes Odysseus, she feels the scar on the thigh of her disguised master. Before she cries out and names him, Homer transports us to Odysseus's beginning, his naming. His grandfather declares: "Let his name be Odysseus, for he will bring pain to many and suffer himself." Later, with his grandfather on a boar hunt, the young Odysseus is gored by a wild pig. Wounded, he slashes back, killing the animal. This is the scar the nurse discovers: "You are Odysseus!" He is the wounded man, the man who wounds. For Odysseus, his scar is his name; his name is his identity.

I came to Israel after graduate school. I knew John Milton's *Paradise Lost* better than the Bible, but it was in Hebrew—the language of Jacob's scar—that I found words for my own.

In the story in Genesis, Jacob prepares to meet Esau, his estranged twin, and finds himself alone on the banks of a river where he is attacked by an angel. The 'angel' is also a man, a god, a satanic force, and guardian angel to his enemy brother. Jacob holds his own in the struggle, but the angel wounds him, popping his hip bone out of its joint. A second fall: Adam and Eve suffer dislocation; they are relocated out of Eden. Jacob cries out, "my soul is split." Not only is his thigh dislocated, but also his mind, conflicted against itself.

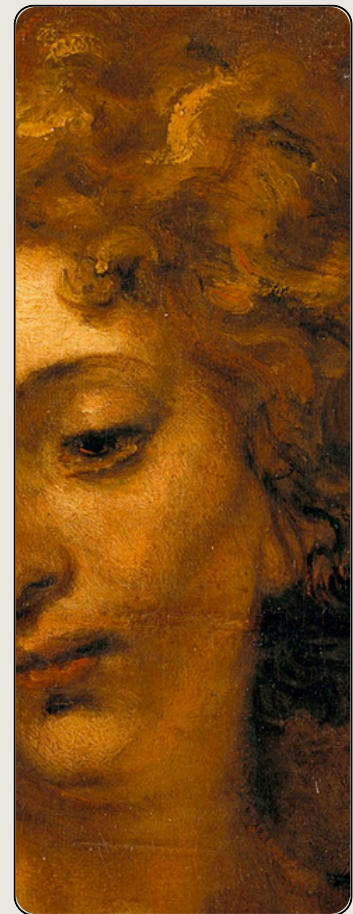
Before letting go, Jacob demands a blessing; the angel bestows it, a new name: Israel. Jacob blesses his children at the end of Genesis for a future none of them live to see. The scar is the place the two names meet—Jacob's scarred imperfection, who he *is*, with Israel, who he *is destined to become*. Jacob calls the place of his wounding 'Peniel'—the place where he saw the face of God. Jacob's future comes with a divine wound.

For Rembrandt, the Jacob and the angel are bound in an ambiguous embrace. The angel's brownish wings dissolve into the earthen terrain of the background. Out of their feathery movement, images come into focus—perhaps a dog's face or a rabbit's profile? With this, Rembrandt places human, animal, and divine on the same continuum. Natural and 'spiritual' worlds come together: angelic love is human; human love, divine. Jacob is loved, and scarred.



Rembrandt's angel is two-faced, intimate and loving on the one side; withdrawn and menacing on the other. On the left, she is maternal, even nurturing, feminine. Her chest is exposed; the strap of her garment rests on the softness of her shoulder. She is ruddy, her hair curled youthfully under her chin, eyeing Jacob with affection, a smile just visible in the corner of her mouth. Her right hand and curled right leg bring Jacob close in an almost erotic embrace. She is part of his world; she loves him; she sustains him.

The angel on the right, however, is already preparing her leaving-taking. She knows she must leave Jacob's human world. Shadows darken her face; curls trail off into melancholy blackness; a scar lines her left cheek. She is careworn, her neck turned unnaturally, a hint of (masculine) vengeance in the corner of her eye. Her hand, firmly on Jacob's hip, pushes him back. The angels in Psalms ask: "what is man that you are mindful of him?" Rembrandt's angel is jealous of Jacob's closeness to God, while remaining fleshly, human.



In the painting, not only is the angel scarred, but Rembrandt ‘scars’ the painting. A thick black line traverses the work. The painting, like Jacob, is dislocated. ‘Both’ angels love Jacob in his human state. But without the dislocation of the human, the scar, there is no new name, no future. The scar is the place where Jacob and Israel are one—the sacred human. Homer’s hero has one name: he starts and ends in Ithaca as Odysseus. Jacob’s wound comes with a *new* name, one that has a future. Only by remaining himself, flawed and human can he become the ideal, Israel.

On October 7th, the scar went from research topic to real life. No longer a scholarly hypothesis in need of a name, it burst open, releasing the toxins from centuries of persecutions and pogroms into our collective blood stream. No amount of Holocaust education could have prepared me for that.

Knowledge of the scar brings responsibility—to the memories of the dead, to the wounded, to the traumatized, in the end, to all of us. But, for me, being a survivor is a privilege I never thought I’d have—to emulate Velvel and be part of his story, part of Israel’s story.

I used to ask about my Long Island privilege—what was it all for?

Now I know.



Roslyn Duck Pond, Roslyn High School Class of '79, New York (Photo: Eric Parker)

PLAYLIST

Scars in Sound

Yehihe Tov – Jasmin Moallem

Song No. 8 – Arik Einstein & Miki Gavrielov

Lost Cause – Beck

Um Min Al Yaman – Yemen Blues

I Couldn't Sleep Again – Alon Eder

Dumb Against the Machine – Noga Erez

Come Back to Earth – Mac Miller

Hagole – Dudu Tassa

'Shabloul' Theme Song – Arik Einstein & Shalom Hanoch

In the Darkest Place – Elvis Costello & Burt Bacharach

Independence Day – Elliott Smith

Torn and Frayed – The Rolling Stones

A Song Without a Name – Yehudit Ravitz



SCAN ME



Photo by Shira Tamir

CONTRIBUTORS

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Howard Gordon is an American screenwriter and film producer. His credits include *24*, *Homeland*, and *Accused*.

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Shira Tamir is an Israeli-American student with a growing passion for politics, diplomacy, and media. She is the Communications Director at *Writing on the Wall*.

Moshe Zaidler is an Israeli painter exploring memory, trauma, and resilience, deeply influenced by his identity as the son of a Holocaust survivor.



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

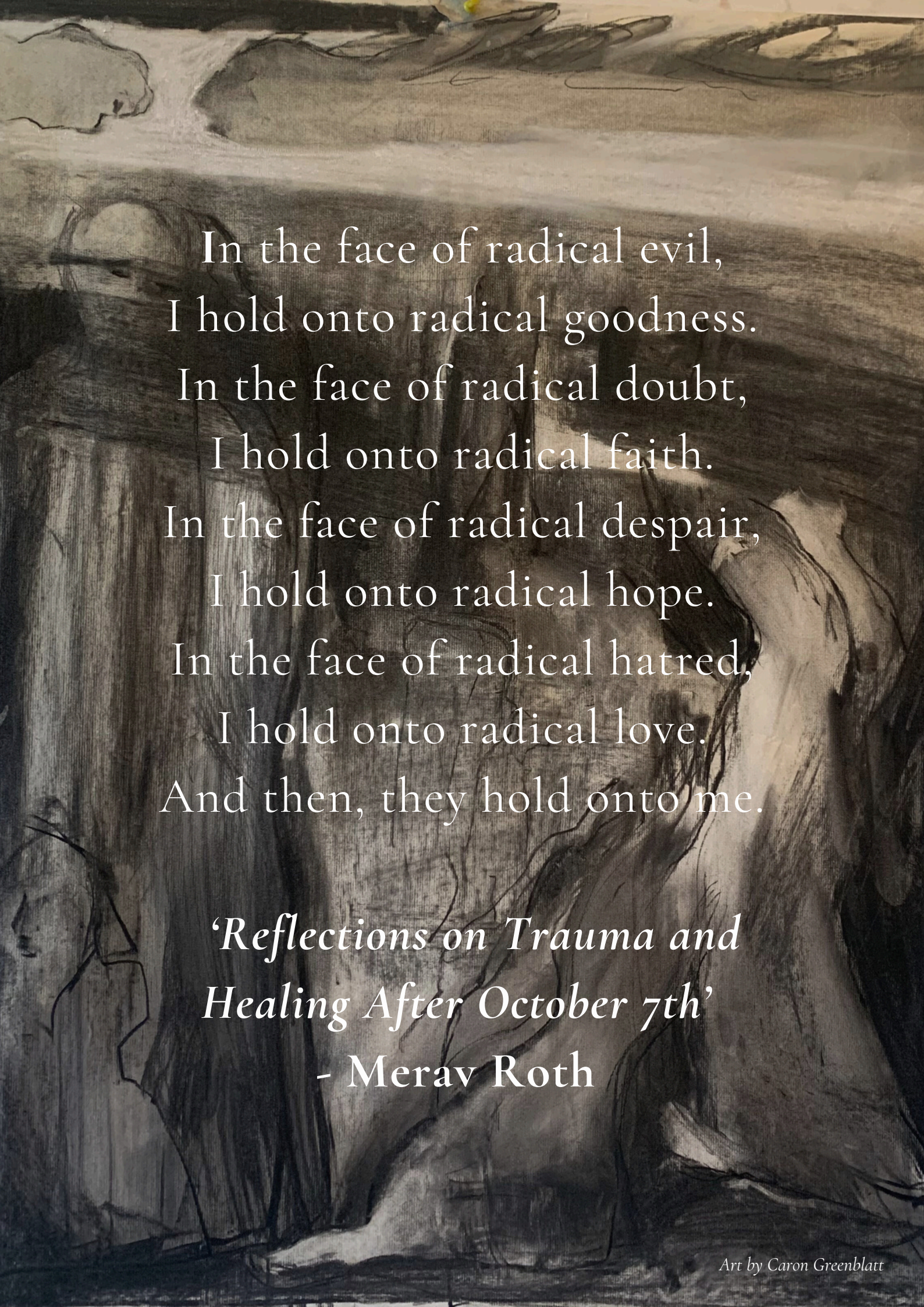
HUMOR

We're now accepting contributions for our next series,
Humor.

Humor as resilience, as survival mechanism, as connector, as truth-telling. Irony, satire, slapstick, black humor - share your poetry, prose, photos, videos, be part of our conversation.

submissions@writingonthewall.io

Deadline for Submissions: February 28, 2025



In the face of radical evil,
I hold onto radical goodness.
In the face of radical doubt,
I hold onto radical faith.
In the face of radical despair,
I hold onto radical hope.
In the face of radical hatred,
I hold onto radical love.
And then, they hold onto me.

*'Reflections on Trauma and
Healing After October 7th'*
- Merav Roth