

Rise, Awake and Sing

by Rachel Heimowitz

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"Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise; awake and sing, you who lie in the dust"

(Isaiah 26:19)

A medieval town where nothing stands straight,
where Kafka sat, slept, ate. Where time
reads backwards on a Hebrew clock and a Golem
waits in an attic for the electric shock of life.
Eight hundred years, a thriving ghetto:
yellow hats, yellow circles, yellow stars;
a child's cut-out of betrayal.

My G-d the soul you have placed in me is pure.

A shul, a great gravestone, vacant,
unused; the winter sun reflects
off the ceiling's vault. The wall's hue
up close becomes something new,
letters, black and red: names:
in Moravia, listed by town,
in Bohemia, by province,
dates of birth and death, a wallpaper
tattoo, back to back, names stacked—
a ladder of names—
eighty thousand dead.

You created it; you have formed it; you have breathed it into me.

On the eastern wall:
Emil (b. 1868-d.1942) straightens
his tie. Berta (b.1874-d.1942) turns,
lights the flame, knowing
warmth fills the house night and day.

On the west:
Hedvika (b. 1914-d.1942) steps

into her pumps, sets her hat,
makes her way to the train.

On the southern wall
with the sun's glance upon them:
Karolina (b. 1932-d.1942) skipping rope.
Oskar (b. 1930-d.1943), a stick, an old wheel,
a downward slope—

You preserve it within me; You will take it from me,

Trying to be Hapsburgs; German impeccable.
Heads high past the guard, one thousand
at a time, boarding trains with favorite dolls,
candlesticks, a bedroll. Delivered
to Terezin, where no one was allowed
to outgrow their shoes. Through
the Schleuse. On the other side
everything removed but a ration card.

Later, on Auschwitz trains, their prayer
is for a bite of bread when they arrive.
Instead stripped, shaved, showers
of foul air. No survivors—only ashes
at the bottom of the Vistula River.

and restore it to me in the hereafter....

You, who line these walls, you are the dry bones,
the flesh formed around the original egg,
the porous souls,
the pure water poured that swept us home,
the bridge between the grave
and the land, ashes fused into rocky
soil, hills that ascend
like milkfat breasts. Your arms, the towns
that hold us; your smiles the rivers
that spring forth, spill over, fall with laughter.
You are the kibbutz fence at night;
your hearts the iron that guards us.

Karolina, Oskar, you fill the schools and parks
while Hedvika sips coffee at the café.

Emil is on his way to shul, as thousands
of Bertas cover their hair at the siren's sound,
strike the match, draw in the holy
flame and bless the Shabbat candles.

Blessed are You, O Hashem, who restores the souls of the dead.

