

is playing in my parents' bedroom.

I could be watching Popeye.

Rising from my bed, I inch down the hallway to my parents' bedroom. Reaching through shadows, I gather my will into knuckles that tap at their door.

My parents are reading the Sunday paper. I shuffle about awkwardly. The gray-blue carpet swallows my knees. I am treading in gray-blue carpet. My voice is a scant flutter of light across shadows.

"Mommy, Daddy, I don't like the baby-sitter. He hurt me."

My father raises his eyebrows and for one brief moment looks at me. He clears his throat and continues to read the paper. My mother glances at him, then leans toward me. Her newspaper section collapses between us.

"What did he do to you?" she asks.

"He hugged me," I mumble from the foot of the bed.

Her eyes tug at me. My throat caves in. Why doesn't she hold me? Why doesn't he say something?

My father swallows his breath and flips through the pages. His legs press into the bedding. My mother looks at my father.

"Don't worry," she says. "We won't let him baby-sit again." I hear her tell me to run downstairs and play with my brothers.

I retreat to the doorway. My mother and father return to reading. Emptied ice cream bowls are stacked on the

night table. Bathrobes are draped over a gray stuffed chair. My father yawns. My mother sighs. The bedroom starts to fade. Tears blur my vision, remain planted in my eyes. I am scared to hold myself.

I descend the hallway stairs one by one past last night's hill of spinach. I return, a castaway, to my desert island. My brothers are wrestling in the living room. Their heads bob up from the floor behind the sofa.

*In the silence of his motions, I wait
for him to leave my body, my
bedroom, my space. I am abandoned
to a task I never asked for.*

Grinning monkeys. They taunt me to join them. I smile weakly. If I play with them, I'll wind up with a busted lip or bruised behind. Not today. I am Olive Oyl, stuck in an empty can of spinach. No one knows that I am lost.

I climb upstairs to my bedroom, stand tiptoe on the desk chair, and raise choice onto the highest shelf. Squeezed among the books, trolls, and trinkets. One day I'll huff and puff and blow the lid off this can of spinach. Choice will leap off the shelf and sink into my arms. □

Gaza

Rachel Tzvia Back

I

After the final heave, house collapsing
in and all the prayers that had held
the ceiling up for years rushing
through dust with a low moan
but leaving, you have seen her
sifting through the rubble,
sandaled foot striking an iron
bedframe, splintered picture
of a prophet's resting place.
With no tears you have seen her,
dry like stone, like tile, and alone.

Then understand the Law as I did not:
we tore the house down and she may not rebuild
there or elsewhere. *Her kitchen smelled of zatar
and of bread.* She will have no home here, no home.

II

Consider the prayers' desertion and our faith
crushed where it had been tucked neatly
between headscarves in the top drawer
even as our walls still stand:

there is no believing now.

*There are only children in the alleys,
their blood darkening the dirt.*

After the rains, this mound will settle,
sink into itself and forget what it was.

But she, who salvaged
herself, will not forget.

This you cannot see, but listen:
how the storm rises, and the hills
move closer to the river.