

Based on *The Book of Paradise* by Itzik Manger

Pisherl and Shmuel-Aba go to Hell

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One evening in late autumn, Pisherl and I were walking home from school when we made a wrong turn. Night was falling, but the lamplighter hadn't yet made his rounds. The sun hung low and red in the sky, transforming Pisherl's face into something dim and unfamiliar. I felt fear creep into me, starting from my toes and growing poisonously upwards. I dropped his hand and backed away. My eyes never left his face. Then we heard the voice of a woman singing, low and sweet. The fading light shifted, and the moment passed.

The lamplighter stumbled out of his house at the end of the street, crumbs from his dinner still caught in his beard, and set about his work. His first lamp illuminated the street sign: Three Patriarchs' Allée. We were in familiar territory after all. Beside me, Pisherl began to laugh. After a time I joined him. To think, this was the source of our fears! The lamplighter moved diligently from pole to pole, each new pool of light illuminating the shy faces of lovers made public or the desperate scuttle of rats fleeing diligent wives. The air smelled crisp and clean; truly it was a beautiful night to walk. But still, the odd feeling from before didn't quite leave us.

We walked slowly down the street, watching the transition from day to night gradually unfold. Market stalls were being disassembled, children followed their mother's cries of dinner, and unsold animals stepped high with joy for surviving market day. As the day crowd hurried away, the night crowd began to trickle in. They were the strollers—the lovers, the weary, and the wealthy. Most notably, the patriarch Jacob was out for a walk with his wives. They formed an odd trio—Rachel clung to Jacob's left shoulder, while Leah clung to his right. They were fighting, each craning their heads across Jacob's chest to scream at the other.

"He loves you more than me!" Leah wailed. She reached one arm out to tear at her wig while keeping the other firmly locked around Jacob's arm. "Such a wig he bought you!

Strawberry blond, and braids smooth as a challah! And I, the mother of four of his children! A disgrace!”

“Hah! The man claims to love me, but clearly he doesn’t at all! My wig is nothing compared to the gold necklace he bought for you! How it glitters, like the sun! In the mornings I watch you admire it as if it were a clay idol!” Rachel spat back, full of venom.

“Ladies, ladies!” Jacob cried. “I love you both in equal measure! Isn’t it true that I brought you both with me to Eden, when I could have only taken one?”

This fact the blessed matriarchs couldn’t argue. For a time they were placated, but they soon resumed their fight, screaming and yanking Jacob’s arms. They seemed almost about to tear Jacob apart, so hard did they pull him.

“Hey! You two, over there!” Jacob called in desperation. Pisherl and I looked up in surprise. We had been standing behind a tree, trying our best to not look like we were staring. Sadly our plan was to no avail. With difficulty Jacob dragged his two wives over to where we stood.

“You two, you were the ones sent to care for the Messiah Ox, yes?” We nodded.

“Ah, so you’ve survived Christian Eden. What a place, their paradise, what a place!” He paused, and looked at us expectantly. We nodded again, and he resumed talking.

“Well, then you’re just the pair I was looking for! You see, I’ve ordered some gifts for my two ladies here, gifts *perfectly equal* in quality and cost, but I’ve been at a loss for how to retrieve them. They’re down in hell. I could have them brought up, but the shipping fee is so high, you know. I always forget to account for it! Someday it’ll leave me broke. And wait until my wives see me then!” He shuddered. “You’d think there would be no tax in paradise, but here we are! Anyways, how would you boys like to pick them up for me? I’d pay you both.”

We nodded our heads in agreement. When a patriarch asks a favor, what choice does one have but to say yes? Jacob explained to us the details of our journey, and we agreed to set out early the next morning. All the while, Rachel and Leah beamed as they clung to him. They left full of good cheer, talking and laughing like good sisters. Jacob's sighs of relief could be heard for several blocks over.

Before they vanished around the corner, I swear I saw Rachel wink at Leah. Pisherl later told me that he heard Leah whisper to Rachel about a job well done. And my friend Pisherl is no liar.

In front of me, the three leaders sat in stunned silence. The rabbi's mouth was open so wide that a spider had crawled inside and made a nest.

"What... what gifts could possibly wait in hell?" The rabbinical judge asked in a trembling voice.

The rich man said his "sunderbar" backwards.

Unlike Eden, which is comfortably divided by religion, there is only one hell. The devil rules over sinners of all types and creeds with the same iron fist. In recent years there has been a great change in hell. The devil, always quick to seize an opportunity, realized the promise of industry. He had his demons turn cauldrons for boiling sinners into tanning kettles, and retrofit the blazing ovens into kilns. Since the remodel, hell has been quite profitable. Hell's factories produce all manner of goods, from cheap furniture that no matter how much you scrub it still reeks faintly of brimstone to the finest luxury perfumes said to be concocted from the tears of the truly repentant. Their catalog, which comes in thousands of languages, is over one million pages in length. One could spend all of their eternity reading through it and still never finish, for new

products are added daily. Hell products are now sold in every Eden shop, where wives celebrate the low prices while their tradesmen husbands complain that they are about to be put out of business.

Still, despite its new coat of paint, hell is still hell. It is extremely easy to enter, but very hard to leave. In school Pisherl and I frequently heard tales of angels gone down to fetch packages or see less-than-pure relatives who had, upon entering, found their wings stripped and the exit impossible to find. Perhaps that would be our fate, lost forever and doomed to spend eternity in hell. It was a chilling thought. After receiving our mission, we headed for home without talking, without looking up. The night no longer pleased us.

That night, I ate dinner with Pisherl's family. Pisherl's parents were both in very poor spirits after hearing about our journey. Only Pisherl's sister Ettl seemed unaffected by our general air of gloom. Her wedding was set to take place in less than two weeks. She sat at the dinner table with her eyes glazed over, staring past her cabbage and onions and into the future.

"The things they make young boys do these days! Isn't that right, Hannah-Deborah?" Pisherl's father asked after finishing his portion of potatoes. In response, Pisherl's mother shook her head.

"My baby, going down to hell... they fly away so young..." She whispered softly. We ate the rest of our meal in silence.

We left at dawn. Before we left, Pisherl and I looked long. If we were unable to return to Eden, we wanted to remember everything. The autumn light shone a rich orange, ringing everything behind us in gold. In the air birds sang sweetly, flying in lazy circles and lines as they traveled south towards Turkish Eden. Leaves drifted softly in the breeze, catching upon the eaves

of low-hanging roofs. Chickens clucked and cows mooed, and men and women shifted in bed as they rose. It was hard to leave the scene, but we needed to. We unfolded our strangely heavy wings and stepped into the abyss.

We fell for what seemed like days. We passed through the heavens, waving to each passing star. Too soon we reached Earth, where we plunged into a river. We tried to say hello to the fish but wound up with mouths full of water instead. Then we passed through the riverbed, falling through the dark heat of inner Earth, falling, falling, until finally our feet hit solid ground and we could fall no more. We had reached the universe bridge.

The bridge was impossible to describe, but I will try my best anyhow. Even in the colorless depths of the abyss, it shone with every color of the rainbow. And this was not an Earth rainbow, with only its drab seven colors—this was an Eden rainbow, that shone with colors never seen by mortal eyes. It was firm yet soft, wide yet narrow, unknowable yet familiar. We stepped onto it and felt at once full of the wisdom of the universe. Then we stepped forward and at once we were filled with doubt, our feet seeming stuck fast to the wood. We could step no more.

“How will we be able to reach the bottom?” Pisherl asked with a note of despair.

I felt doubt pulling at me, calling for my legs to collapse and sink between the bridge’s cracks. With great effort I managed to look down, but I couldn’t see the bottom of the bridge. I looked above, and though we had just arrived I couldn’t see its beginnings. For the first time in my existence I felt truly alone. Not even in hell and already lost for good! In my mind I saw Hannah-Deborah’s tears. My heart ached for her, and for Pisherl, and for myself, who had no one at home to mourn me.

Then I had an idea. If I was truly alone, then I was also the sole master of my own fate. I pulled off my coat and sat down. Instantly the bridge curved downwards. I began to slide at a

monstrously fast pace. Pisherl copied me, and soon we were sliding together. We laughed despite the danger, and the bridge responded, sending up cascades of color so luminous that they rang with sound. In no time at all we touched solid ground. The bridge receded behind us, taking with it color and light. The abyss hung upon us, dark and empty. We had reached hell.

The ground was grey with dense soot. Pisherl bent to wipe his boots, only to find his hands covered in grime as well. He grimaced and shoved his hands into pockets. From somewhere there came light, but it was pallid and grim, filtered through clouds of smog.

“What now?” Pisherl asked. His voice echoed in the endless chasm.

Suddenly, a man appeared before us. For the life of me I cannot describe his appearance. His only distinctive feature was his lack of any distinctive features. He looked like everyone, and no one, all at once.

“Welcome to hell.” He told us with a smile. He beckoned us with his hand, and we had no choice but to follow.



He looked like everyone, and no one, all at once.

The devil led us by wing through the cloudy sky, navigating expertly despite the poor visibility. He always flew just too fast for us to easily keep pace, or just too slow for us to fly at a comfortable pace. Still, we needed to stay with him, or we would be lost for good. Finally, we emerged soot-stained and hacking from the clouds. It was then that I caught my first glimpse of hell proper.

Hell is a city of high towers, grey and black buildings that start from the center of the earth and reach high into the sooty clouds above. The streets were paved by a madman, at once too narrow and uncomfortably wide. The pavement smells of worn boots and sweat, and the air echoes with anguished cries. There is no color in the city other than the dull reds and oranges of the fires in the massive factories. It smells of despair and eternity, a cruel strength.

Below us, the streets rolled with an undulating grey mass. When I looked closer, I was able to pick out heads and feet and hair. So these were the sinners of hell, I thought. They seemed to blend together into one body, winding endlessly forward like a silvery river. The sound of their feet marching in unison was deafening.

The sinner's work shirts stuck out at strange angles along their back. I pointed to them and asked the demon why.

"Ah, that's simple. When sinners first arrive, they come with glittering wings like you two have. The first thing we do is clip them. The feathers make for excellent pillows."

Occasionally, one of the bumps would twitch. I felt happy that I hadn't eaten.

"Faster, you lice! What, you think you're being paid?" The demon snapped the whip at his side. It hit a small woman. Her cry was lost in the pounding of feet.

“Soon, they’ll reach the factory. Which factory? It doesn’t matter. They’ll work hard until they want to collapse from hunger or exhaustion. But, since they’re not mortal, they can’t. So they must continue to work, work, and work some more. Truly a wonderful system, no?”

Pisherl and I were too stunned to answer. In the back of my mind, I recalled the peasants working King David’s estate. At least they could sing.

“Are people ever freed?” Pisherl asked.

“Never!” The demon said, gleeful. “Never, never, never!”

In the near distance, an enormous black building loomed. Its gates seemed like an open mouth, waiting to swallow.

“Ah, the cider factory! Truly a splendid building, no? A monument to industry. Let’s go inside.” The demon folded his wings and swooped low. He landed on top of the pulsing crowd, then began to hop nimbly from head to head. He beckoned us with his hand, and we were forced to follow.

“Angels,” cried the Rabbi, “following the whims of a demon!” His wrinkled face turned redder still.

“Demons making feather pillows!” Cried the Rabbinical judge, pulling clumps of goose down from his hair.

“What sort of profits do they make?” Asked the rich man.

I shushed them all and continued with my story.

The factory gates loomed tall and black. A cluster of sinners broke away from the group and funneled inside like so many ants. Pisherl and I folded our wings and dropped behind them.

The demon landed beside us and strode confidently inside. We followed him significantly more hesitantly.

Beyond the gates, the first thing that hit me was the smell. It smelled of rotten apples, ancient dust, and cold steel. Pisherl covered his nose.

“What’s that smell?” He asked the demon, his voice distorted from behind his hands.

“Ah, just our famous cider! Truly a fine beverage. Especially for growing children. How do we make it, you ask?” We hadn’t. The demon continued. “You’ve seen the tree of knowledge up in your Eden, no? Well, have you ever wondered what happens to the fruit of the tree, once its bloom is done?” We shook our heads. The thought had never crossed our mind.

“The fruit, once its glory fades, falls straight down from the tree. It falls down and down, passing through sky and earth back to its master in hell. Our lord used to enjoy the fruits, drinking himself sick on forbidden knowledge, but he’s long since grown bored of it. Every taboo becomes mundane after a time, even the greatest. In his stupor, our lord began to think back to the last time something had truly thrilled him. It was the temptation of Eve. Sinning alone grows dull, but dragging others into sin never loses its spark. So he devised a plan to share the fruits. He had a vat set up to catch the falling apples, and a distillery built around it. In time that distillery grew, maturing into the fine factory you see today.”

My empty stomach rolled.

“Shall we press on?” It wasn’t a question. Pisherl and I followed the demon in a stupor, as if possessed.

The demon gave us a detailed tour, frequently pausing to point out what he deemed to be important sights. Pisherl and I often tried to turn and leave, but the demon always noticed and

pushed us onwards, deeper and deeper into the factory's dark bowels. Of our tour, I recall only one of the stops.

"The break room." The demon stopped us and pointed to a small iron door embedded in the wall. "Try to open it."

Pisherl tried the handle, but the doorframe was fused to the wall. The demon laughed, a dull laugh. The sound echoed off of the walls, pursuing us as we continued deeper inside.

Finally, we reached a vast chamber.

"The vats," said the demon. The stench here was a solid thing, pushing out all thoughts, all reason. I stared ahead, my eyes watering, my body fighting the smell with everything it had. Dimly in the back of my head I heard the demon's steady voice pointing out different parts of the cider-making process. "Sorting... Washing... Pressing... Packing..."

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Gradually my eyes cleared enough for me to take in my surroundings. The air in the room baked like an oven. The room was ringed by a series of painted-shut windows. Though massive, they were clouded with ash. They let in only the barest sliver of light from outside. Once inside, the light joined with the light of the fires underneath the kettles to produce a dull orange fog that blanketed the room. Below me, vats bubbled, belts pressed along to a steady tick, and gears clanked ominously. Aside from the hum of machinery, the only other sound was the occasional scream. Sinners ran about diligently, their ankles parting the smog. They tended the machines almost lovingly, speaking not a word. In their grey work clothes, they too seemed like a part of the machine.

“They’re very good workers, no?” Said the demon. “Very placid. You know, for millenia I spent all my days and nights hard at work torturing these poor souls. It was tiring, truly. Never a vacation, never a rest! Then along came invention, innovation, capitalism! Now, I needn’t do anything. The sinners torture themselves!” The demon laughed, a cold laugh. The sound vanished amidst the wail of machinery. Then he turned on his heels.

“Come now. You’ve looked long enough. You have a package to pick up, no?”

The demon showed us to the perfume factory, where we picked up our package of two identical vials of Eden peony from a nondescript factory store. The demon behind the counter looked either nothing like or exactly like our tour guide. When we thanked her, she said nothing.

It was nearly nighttime by the time we left the perfume store. Our demon guide led us to one of the endless grey towers. We flew up several dozen floors, where he stopped us. We perched on a narrow windowsill while he unlocked the window to a small room.

“Spend the night here, children. And who knows? Perhaps you’ll enjoy our lord’s hospitality so much, that you’ll choose to stay forever!” He raised his dark wings and vanished as mysteriously as he appeared.

Pisherl and I climbed inside the window. In the room there was a single bed, a single desk, and a single chair. A single candle burned furtively in a corner. Despite its best efforts, the room was still blanketed in shadow. Pisherl collapsed on the bed. He groaned.

“The things I do for my father, to make a little cash! And my aunt and uncle, with so much to spare, what must they do? You’re lucky, Shmuel-Aba, that you don’t have family. Your struggles are your own. Anyways, I’m going to bed. I don’t want to have to look at this horrific place for any longer.”

I climbed into the bed next to him and lay down. I tried to think about what Pisherl had just said, but it was no use. My head was clouded with dense fog, and I fell asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow.

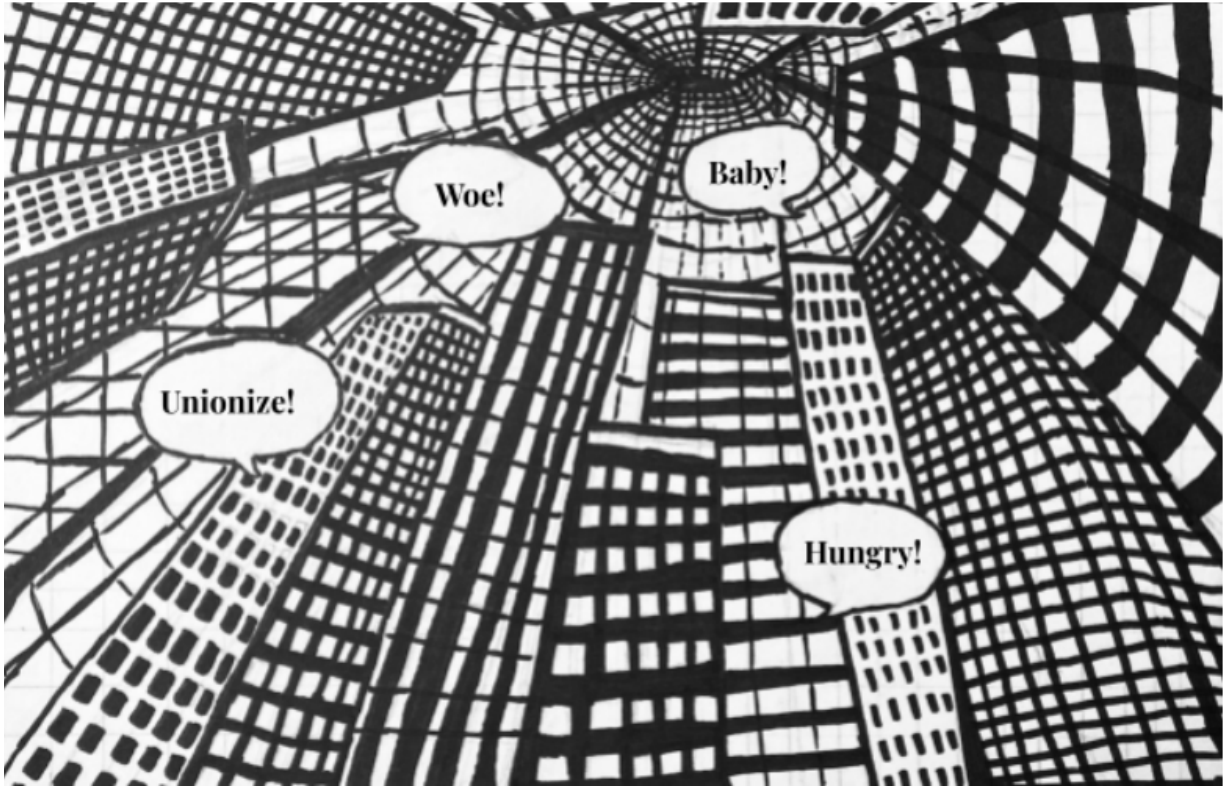
I was awoken by the sound of a voice. At first I couldn’t follow what they said, but as I listened closer I was able to pick it up. It was a woman’s voice, calling out the names of fruit. “Apples, just slightly rotten! Pears, only a little moldy! Grapes, more than halfway to wine!” There were street venders in hell? Reluctantly I opened my eyes and looked around the room. Our paltry candle had burned itself out, and the pale light of the sky had faded. Night had fallen.

A woman selling fruit wasn’t so odd, I decided. Of course hell would have a street vendor or two. I lay back down to sleep, but just as my head touched the pillow I heard another voice. This time, it was a man’s. He was calling, “Unionize! Unionize! Oh, how these demons exploit us, and for what? For being too poor in our mortal lives to give charity? Injustice!” The man’s

voice cut through me, filling me with righteous anger. I leaned back up to try to hear more, but I had lost him. Instead I heard a woman sobbing, calling for her child.

“Oh, my baby went to Eden but I was cast here! I toil day in and day out, making up for some sin I don’t even remember, and for what? So some strange Eden woman can care for my child? Where’s the sense in that, splitting us up? How can my son enjoy paradise without his mother? Oh, woe!” A lump formed in my throat. I swallowed, and then the woman’s voice was lost.

Now I heard too many voices, the voices of any number of people. They swirled and grew, each calling their own lament or hope, until they filled my head completely. “Save us!” “Hungry!” “Unions!” “My baby!” “Sin!” “Justice!” “Woe!” They swirled and swelled within me until they threatened to tear me apart. Each time I blinked, I heard a new voice. Each time I twitched, I lost one. Eventually, I could no longer keep track of individual voices. They blended into one note, one sound, calling out one incessant and urgent message: “Alive!” “Alive!” “Alive!”



Now I heard too many voices, the voices of any number of people. They swirled and grew, each calling their own lament or hope, until they filled my head completely.

The cry rang out from every window and every door of every impossibly tall building. Even the grey stones of the street seemed to be calling out “Alive!” “Alive!” How could I sleep with such a cacophony? I was filled with energy, with vibrance. I wanted to live, to experience the world as I had never seen before! I opened the window of our room and leaned out. Outside, the call was even louder. It seemed even to have a smell, halfway between sour hell cider and fine hell perfume. So this was the city, I thought. Truly it is a topsy-turvy place. Its days are nights, dark as the pitch they pour in their factories. And its nights are bright as days, bright with the light of hope and life.

I cast my eyes around the dark street. Gradually, my eyes adjusted and I was able to pick out details that I had missed during the single-minded rush of the day. Odd blades of grass poked stubbornly up from between the cracks in the seemingly lifeless paving stones. Across the street, just behind the window, sat a lonely daisy in a pot. It seemed to smile at me, its head cocked as if trying to sing along to the song of life. Behind the daisy, there was motion in the room. I saw a tablecloth flutter, heard children called one by one. Then someone came and pulled the tattered curtains closed, and I could see no more.

Next to me, a window opened, and a man’s head emerged. The window above him followed suit, and another man stuck his head out. He leaned out his window to embrace the first man, and they kissed passionately. A third window opened, this time an old lady, who waved a rolling pin at them.

“Save some love for the rest of us!” She cried, but her tone was kind.

I looked down. On the street, I caught sight of a woman hurrying, a soot-stained scarf pulled tight around her head. Her bare feet clicked lightly on the pavement. How I managed to hear above everything, I’m not quite sure. All I can say is that something about her called to me.

I knew I had to follow her. Quietly, carefully, I slipped out of the window. In the bed, Pisherl snored softly.

I followed the woman from a distance. She wound nimbly through tight streets without names, ran down wide boulevards dodging desperate peddlers. I never once blinked, for to do so would be to lose her among the vast sea of faces and sounds.

Finally, she turned around an impossibly sharp corner and slipped into a building. I ducked in after her and hid in a corner. The room was dark and seemed empty. All I could see were flecks of dust raining softly from the low ceiling. Out on the street, the cacophony had threatened to deafen me, but here in the room all was silent as the grave. Gradually my eyes adjusted, and I was able to make out the room's only furniture: a small table flanked by two small chairs. One of the chairs was empty. On the second chair there sat a faint round form.

The girl walked delicately across the room.

"Mother?" Her voice was as soft as her footfalls.

"Sit, child." The dark form took shape. A woman's face emerged from beneath a shawl. Her face reminded me of a peach left to rot, worn and sallow. But her eyes seemed to glow in the darkness.

"You have the candles?" She asked her daughter. Nodding, the girl reached into her bag and pulled out two gleaming white candles.

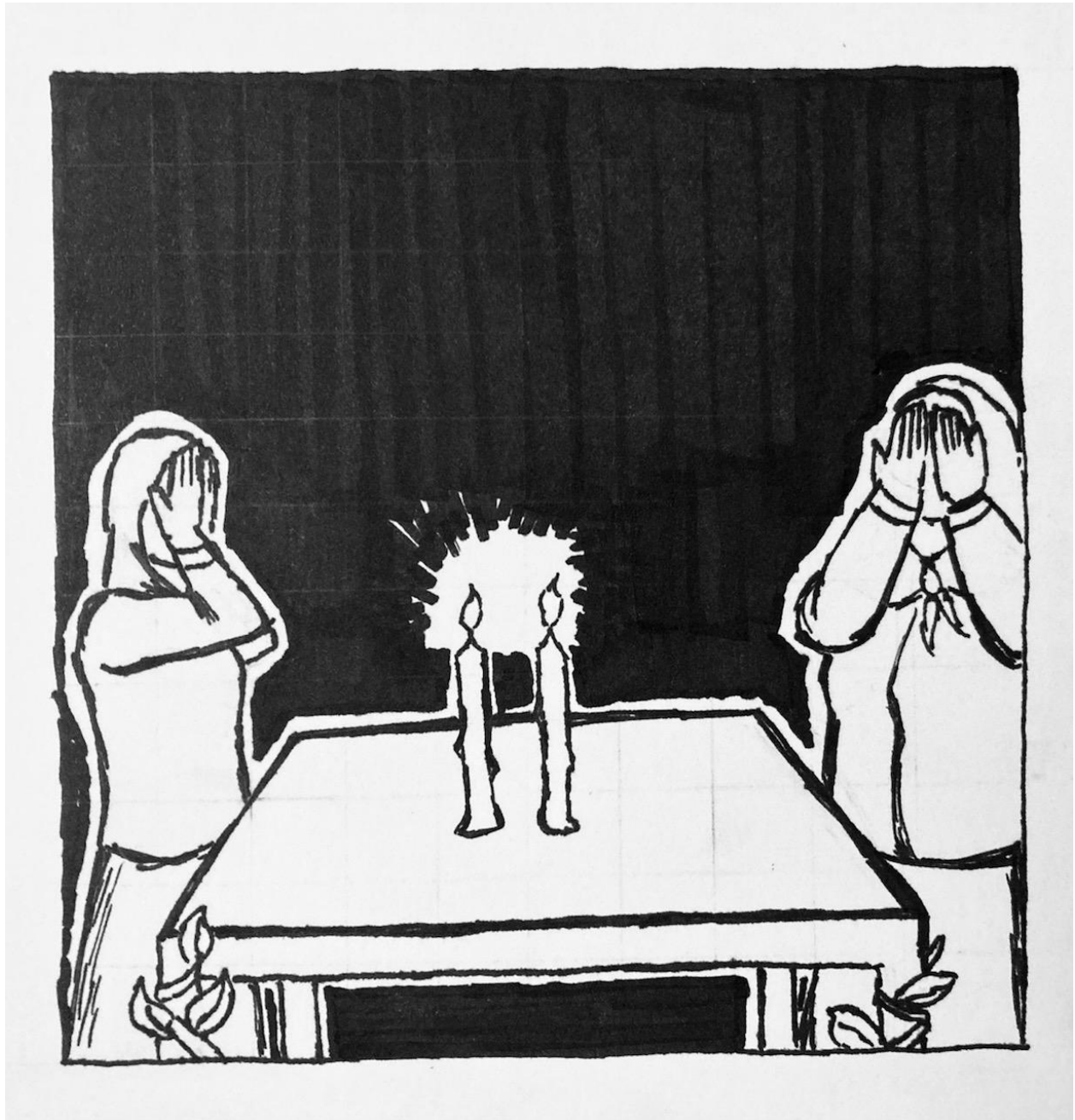
"Good, good. Set them up on the table, dear. We have no holders, but we can make do." The girl stood the candles up on the table. Somehow, they didn't topple. From somewhere came the sound of a match striking. The elderly woman lit the candles and began softly to pray. Her daughter joined in, their disjointed voices coming together to make a melody that rivaled any in Eden.

Dimly I realized that it was Friday evening. Shabbat! Pisherl and I had gotten so caught up in the workings of hell that we'd forgotten. Yet somehow these beleaguered sinners, cast for eternity into a land where days bled together and lost their shape, somehow they had remembered. Somehow, despite everything, they remembered.

"We won't be here forever, will we, mama?" The girl asked after bathing her face in the candlelight.

"We can only have hope."

Overwhelmed, I slipped out the door.



The elderly woman lit the candles and began softly to pray. Her daughter joined in, their disjointed voices coming together to make a melody that rivaled any in Eden.

By the time I returned to our room, it was nearly morning. Strangely, I wasn't at all tired as I settled into the bed next to Pisherl. In his sleep, he had pulled his pillow over his ears. I closed my eyes and let the city flow over me in strange electric currents, shocking me to sleep.

Suddenly, there was the sound of a whistle. It cut through everything, evaporating the city's cries. Then it stopped. For a second, there was not a sound throughout the entirety of hell. Then came the snap of millions of doors unlocking, followed a moment later the crash of them closing. Then, the sound of feet rushing, pounding on pavement drowned out all else. The day had begun.

Pisherl was sitting up in bed next to me. He still looked quite asleep.

"Those sinner-feather pillows are surprisingly comfortable" was all he said.

A few minutes later, a demon came to tell us that it was time to go. He was a different demon than the one from the day before, I thought, but I wasn't quite sure. With demons, one never truly knows.

Pisherl and I readied our things in silence. The demon led us outside and we lifted off. In the air, we took our last looks at hell.

"Good riddance." Pisherl said as he looked away. I said nothing. Yet it seemed that my body had betrayed me. I couldn't help but look back, even when we had flown so far that only the cloud of smog was visible. Deep in my heart, I knew that I would someday return.

Process Paper

Despite his original intention to write a trilogy, following the events of the Holocaust Itzik Manger was never able to bring himself to write sequels to *The Book of Paradise*. As a result, Shmuel-Aba's story remains tragically unfinished. Through our project, Zoe and I wish to offer up one possible interpretation for the continuation of Shmuel-Aba's life.

We have created a new chapter within Shmuel-Aba's life where he and Pisherl go to visit Hell. Our hell is designed to be the complete opposite of Eden. It is industrial, urban, and integrated. Whereas Eden plays host to many strong personalities, hell is impersonal.

During the night, Eden transforms from a happy place to a sinister one. In hell the reverse occurs. Hell comes to life, and people become humans with individual dreams and desires. At the story's close, Shmuel-Aba, despite himself, cannot stop thinking about Hell and the people who live there. Just as Eden is an imperfect paradise, our hell is likewise not so clear cut.

In creating the story, we had two main goals: for our work to make sense within the context of *The Book of Paradise* and for our work to also touch on other works within the larger context of modern Yiddish literature. Within our project, we directly reference Der Nister's story "Beheaded" through our inclusion of the universe bridge. We chose to do this as a method of building a Yiddish cosmology, in which different writer's ideas combine to create a rich world. To that end, we also indirectly reference other Yiddish and Jewish creators. These works/creators include the Hebrew bible, which we reference through our inclusion of biblical characters and locations. Additionally, we reference the work of Bashevis Singer through our focus on demons and the supernatural. Finally, we reference the work of Franz Kafka through our heavily industrialized vision of hell.

We created our project in a series of steps. First, we met to formulate our ideas. We created our setting, planned our plot, and decided on themes as a pair. Then we split up to draft. Rachel wrote and Zoe drew. Periodically throughout our process, we met to share our progress and edit as a pair. Our process paper is organized to reflect this: our introduction describes work we did together, while later sections reflect our individual artistic processes.

Rachel: Notes on Writing

I knew from the start of the term that I wanted to write some kind of short story for my final project. As the semester progressed, I entertained a number of ideas, most concretely some sort of stylistic response to Dvora Vogl's prose poem. What inspired me to ultimately turn away from that and all other ideas was our discussion about whether *The Book of Paradise* was intended for children or adults. Outside of my interest in world modernism, I mostly read middle grade novels and graphic novels. Children's literature is routinely underappreciated and undervalued. My mother (the world's fiercest critic of picture books) tells me often that good literature is good literature, no matter its intended audience. This holds especially true for children's literature: a good children's book transcends boundaries of age, and is enjoyable for all age ranges. This is why, to me, a good work of children's literature is more impressive than a good work of adult fiction.

To me, *The Book of Paradise* is an excellent children's book. It is easy enough to understand that I could imagine my mother reading it to me as a child before bed yet it is simultaneously complex enough to be analyzed in literature classes. It's the sort of book that you can reread again and again throughout different stages of your life and pick up something new each time. Because of this, the concept of responding to *The Book of Paradise* felt very

appealing because I could challenge myself to write something simple and direct enough for a young child to understand while also trying to portray complex ideas.

Another feature of *The Book of Paradise* that drew me in was its incompleteness. Nothing about *The Book of Paradise*'s ending is conclusive. Having read Manger's brief introduction, throughout my entire reading experience I was haunted by the story's unfinished potential. With that context in mind, my reading experience felt almost like mourning. Yet within this loss, there was also a spark of potential: because the work at its core is so unfinished, it invites readers to create their own endings. For my part, I'm not sure how the story ends, but I do have my strong thoughts about what happens to Shmuel-Aba as he matures from childhood into young adulthood. Obviously Zoe and I cannot produce an entire sequel about his coming of age, but we can produce a condensed version of events through an additional tale. In my mind, our story serves as a prequel for Shmuel-Aba's adult life, where his curiosity and vitality will push him from his native shtetl and into the impersonal bustle of city life. I was inspired by Itsik Manger's song of the boy who, despite his mother's protests, must turn into a bird and fly away from home. I decided to use it as an inspiration for my interpretation of Shmuel-Aba's character. Therefore, he cannot help but be drawn to our version of Hell as it represents modernity and the wider world.

I struggled to balance my creative impulses with the context of early twentieth century Jewish life. This was definitely a challenge, as it is impossible to completely work within the framework of a culture other than one's own. My first challenge lay in characterization. Shmuel-Aba's characterization was not particularly challenging, since Zoe's and my vision for his character was created to match our interpretation of Manger's work. His character was set from the beginning, and it was the lynchpin that we used to build the rest of our tale. Yet Pisherl's

characterization proved much more difficult. The challenge arose from the contrast between our story and Manger's. In Manger's writing, Pisherl needs to always be outgoing, adventurous, and knowledgeable. By this logic, it is he who should enjoy the trip to hell and Shmuel-Aba who should long for home. Yet in order for our story to work, we needed to play with Pisherl's characterization. I decided to lean heavily on Pisherl's family connections to Eden in order to make his character less willing to explore the world. To further that end, I chose to play up Shmuel-Aba's rootlessness and sense of self in order to ground his characterization.

Another challenge I faced while writing the story was the question of length. Originally, we planned for the story to be about five pages long. However, from early on it became clear that five pages simply would not be enough space to tell a story as complex as our vision. The structure of our story was loosely based on the structure of the Messiah Ox storyline with *The Book of Paradise*. Our story is obviously much shorter, but contains roughly as many key events. Because of this, nothing is as fleshed out as would be ideal.

The short length of our story forces it to move at a very fast pace. This in turn shapes the tone of our work. *The Book of Paradise* is very slow-paced, creating an easy-going and light-hearted tone. Our story, in contrast, has a much more intense tone. This difference in tone was ultimately what shaped a major decision in my writing process. Originally, I wanted to write this story as close to Manger's style as possible. Yet the more I wrote, the more I found myself falling into my own style. This happened for a number of reasons. The first has to do with the inherent difficulty of trying to write within the context of another writer's style, especially when one is an inexperienced writer and lacks a concrete style of their own. The second lies within the differences between the story Manger wished to tell and the story we wished to tell. In creating our story, Zoe and I were always conscious of the differences between our perspectives and

Manger's. Obviously, neither of us grew up in a shtetl, so we chose a setting we were more familiar with: the modern city (specifically our least favorite city, New York). However, our differences went past just differences in life experience. We wanted to tell a story that was relevant to us and our time, not one that was simply a nostalgic callback. Hence, the social issues of hell reflect not just the issues of Manger's day but also of our own. Ultimately, we decided that it was more important that our own voices, and the story that we created with them, come through. After this decision, copying Manger's style became less important to me and I felt more free to tell my story how I thought best.

Zoe: Notes on Illustrations

I had been interested in potentially writing and illustrating a comic for my final project, so when Rachel suggested that we collaborate on writing a sequel to Manger's *The Book of Paradise* I jumped at the opportunity. I was interested in exploring the themes of modernism and urbanization in my artwork for the story, and I tried to incorporate these themes into both the subjects of my illustrations and my art style. In terms of subject matter, I knew from the beginning I wanted to have at least one drawing of Hell's cityscape, and I wanted to emphasize its impossible height and crowdedness. I visited New York City over Thanksgiving break this past fall, and I remember seeing a section of a block that seemed to be in twilight even though the sun was still out because of shade from the buildings, and based on that I envisioned our urban Hell as a city in a state of perpetual dusk. I thought that seeing Hell from a worm's-eye view would do a good job of driving home the sense of claustrophobia I wanted to convey. I also wanted to make sure I drew one of the demons— I ended up departing somewhat from the more traditional Jewish depiction of demons as having animal's feet by portraying the demons as being completely nondescript in accordance with our idea of Hell as impersonal. Although the demon

is not literally faceless, I drew him without clear facial features in order to emphasize his lack of a distinctive appearance. His clothes are plain, but as an enforcer of the laws of Hell he wears a police badge.

When it came to style, I wanted to draw in a way that would contrast with the original story's fairytale-like illustrations. My primary stylistic influence was an illustrated collection of short stories by Franz Kafka called *Give It Up! And Other Short Stories*, with artwork by Peter Kuper. Its stark, heavy linework and shading and somewhat dreamlike quality did a good job of conveying both the urban setting and the absurdism of the stories, and I thought it was a good fit for our story. In my free time, I also read a lot of comic books and science fiction, and I took inspiration from those genres for the machinery of Hell. Specifically, much of the machinery in the distillery was inspired by Jack Kirby's artwork, which I think marries the industrial and the fantastical very well. In addition to the aesthetics of it, I thought basing some of my illustrations off of comic book artwork would be appropriate because of the close ties between the early comic book industry and twentieth-century Jewish-American history; while it doesn't fall under the purview of Yiddish literature, does nevertheless tie into our course.