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## This Is for You, Morris Rosenthal

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THIS IS FOR YOU,  
MORRIS ROSENTHAL  
STEVE ALMOND



Who sailed out of your mother's home on the end of your father's boot at the age of eight and studied talmud in long stone halls, ate humbly with strange families and later, in the Czar's army, wrote love letters for pale Cossack boys, trading fatted sausage for the black pumpernickel on which you subsisted for three years.

At the *gymnasium*, you saw a professor make a rainbow from light and mist and this made you an atheist, though the truth is doubtless sadder, the slow rot of belief.

In Harlem, Morris, you became a dentist of brutal and outmoded methods, hammered fillings, glued bridges, pulled your own teeth out one by one. You married a woman too young and beautiful. Your children grew American in attitude: privileged resisters. You never earned enough, the stove went cold before dawn.

At night, locked away from your riotous family, you studied again, carved a manifesto onto long yellow tablets. Your children became Communists, lovers of the brutal, and your wife fell away from you, into the fist of God. Nights, by dim lantern, memory yanked you awake, shivering. Where were you? Bialystock? Sedgewick Avenue? Babylon?

You didn't believe in Babylon, not anymore. You hoped to prove the Torah was not a holy book, but a tale of doubt and exile, mistakes and contradictions. This shouldn't have been so hard. The proof was your life. But your life, year by crumbling year, led you backwards: to the rainbow, the pumpernickel, the stony halls of study. And your hands, pitching the pages onto the embers, trembled.

