

THE REFORM JEWISH QUARTERLY

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Jacob was Left Alone (Genesis 32:25)

Rabbi Dan Ornstein

Why did Jacob remain behind after he sent his household off into two camps to escape Esau his brother? He went back to retrieve some small utensils that had been left. (From The Talmud)

On the eve of Esau,
before he could know
if blood would
embrace blood
or be mingled with it,
Jacob hung back in
the camp littered
with ghosts.
A battered box
forgotten in the packing
lay on the earth,
pathetic as Pandora
on the morning after.
Though his stomach rumbled
an anxious earthquake,
and his hands flapped, flaccid,
with useless terror,
his eyes could not
dislodge it.
Opening the weathered case,
his tongue withered
as he touched and sniffed
the stewing pot,
long-ago lentils
still clinging

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POETRY

with judgment
to its insides.
"I might as well eat,"
he sighed, as he
built a fire,
boiled some water,
and cooked a porridge
like mama had shown him,
until the hard legumes
were tender.
Slowly filled his belly
with comfort food,
a scant comfort simmered
in a tormenting night.