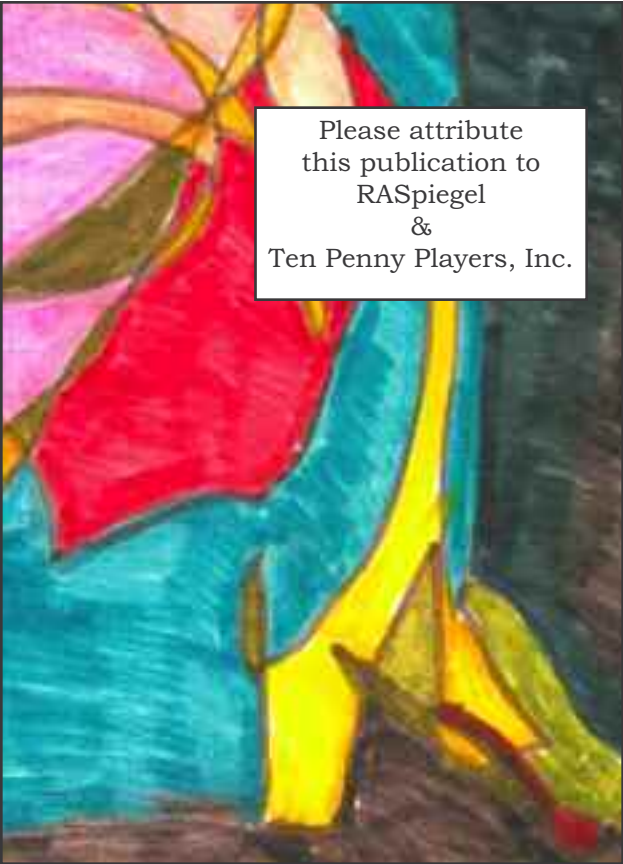



Almost Midnight
by
Richard Alan Spiegel

An abstract painting featuring bold, expressive brushstrokes in vibrant colors: pink, red, teal, yellow, and green. The composition is dynamic, with overlapping shapes and textures. A white rectangular box with a black border is centered over the painting, containing attribution text.

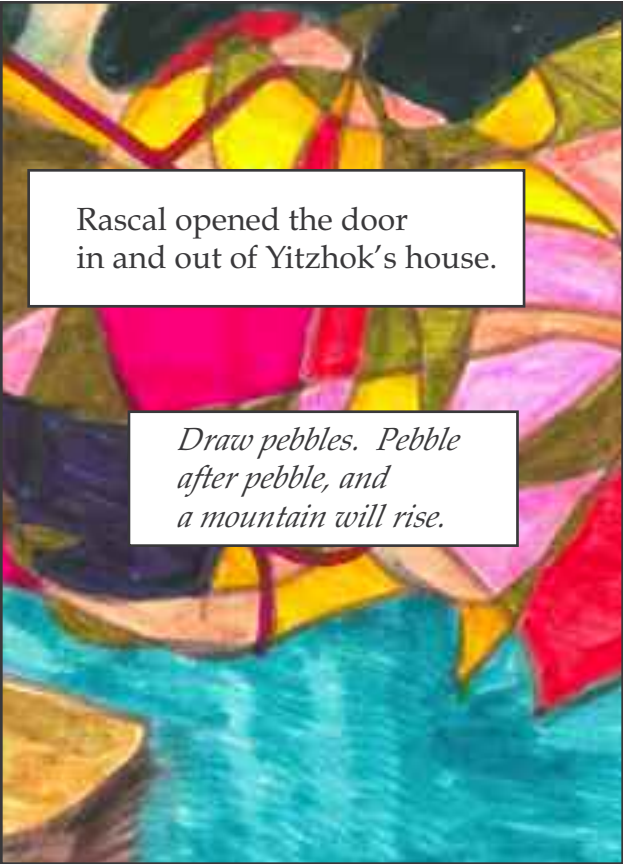
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Almost midnight.
I won't give in to despair.

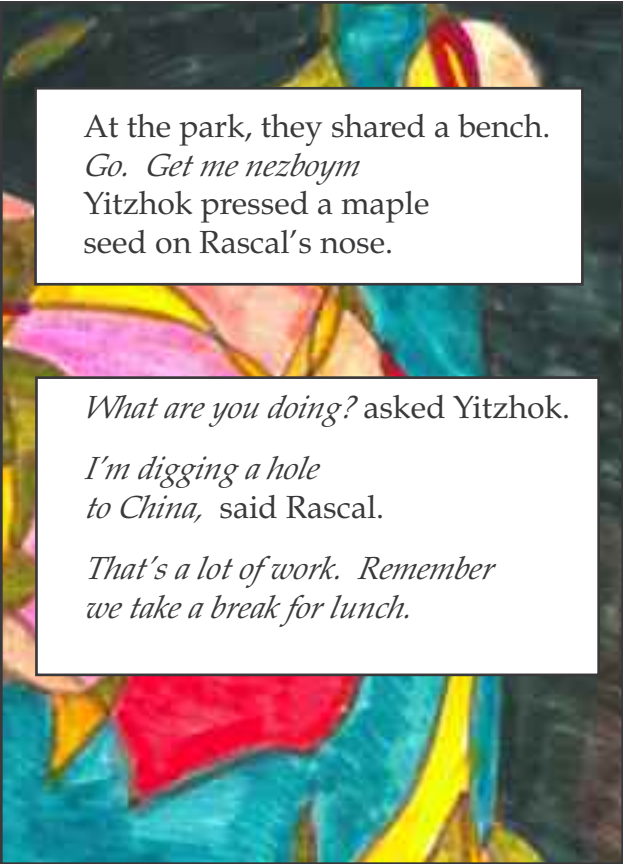
The dog raises his head
from the floor as I pass

on my way to the laptop
on the cluttered table.




Rascal opened the door
in and out of Yitzhok's house.

*Draw pebbles. Pebble
after pebble, and
a mountain will rise.*



At the park, they shared a bench.
Go. Get me nezboym
Yitzhok pressed a maple
seed on Rascal's nose.

What are you doing? asked Yitzhok.
*I'm digging a hole
to China,* said Rascal.
*That's a lot of work. Remember
we take a break for lunch.*



*What did you mean,
Heidi asked,
by grey limbo
of elusive time?*

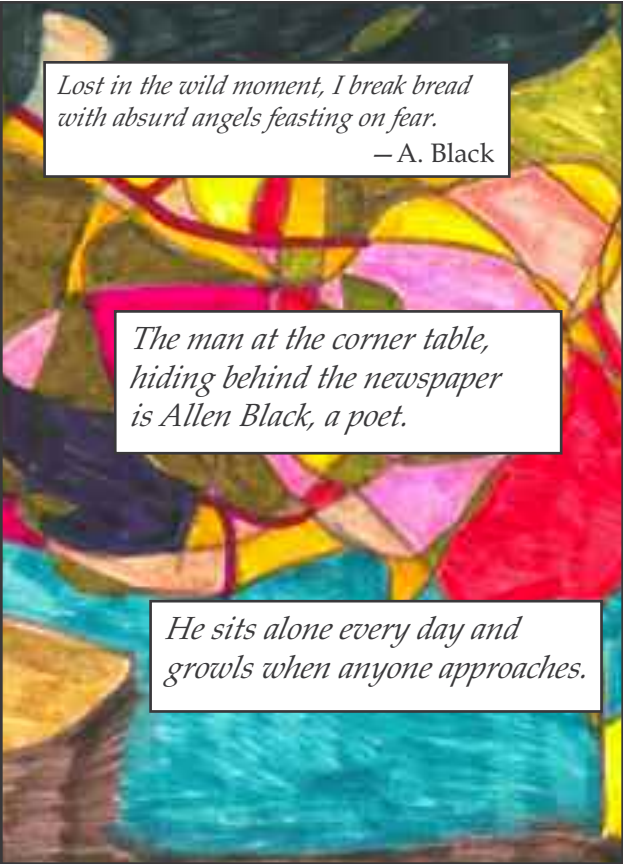
*You desperately
need to laugh.*

*You take the world
too seriously.*



*The last time I was here,
said Rascal, a fight broke out.*

*We sat at our table
and watched.*



*Lost in the wild moment, I break bread
with absurd angels feasting on fear.*

— A. Black

*The man at the corner table,
hiding behind the newspaper
is Allen Black, a poet.*

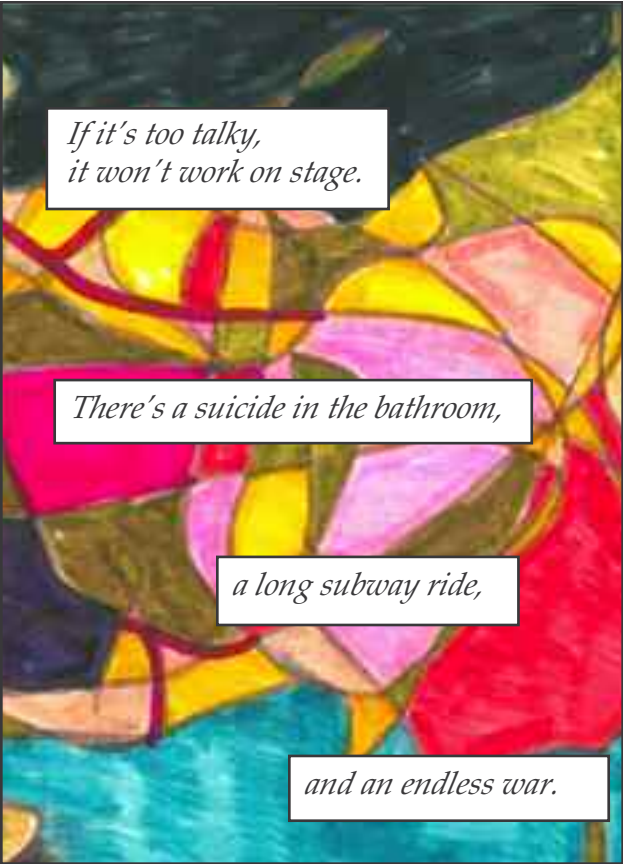
*He sits alone every day and
growls when anyone approaches.*



*Jeremy! Come join us.
Heidi called out. You
need to read Rascal's play.*

When did he write it?

Over the weekend.



*If it's too talky,
it won't work on stage.*

There's a suicide in the bathroom,

a long subway ride,

and an endless war.




Heidi looked over Jeremy's shoulder.

*Directing is more than blocking the action.
There's a social responsibility
to bring out an audience.*

Jeremy wanted an archetypal
theater experience,

*Which came first –
the ritual or the audience?*

An abstract painting with vibrant, overlapping colors including yellow, pink, red, blue, and green, set against a dark background. The brushstrokes are visible, creating a textured, layered effect.

The performers, friends from the cafe,
arrived at the church in the Village.

The theater seated 30.

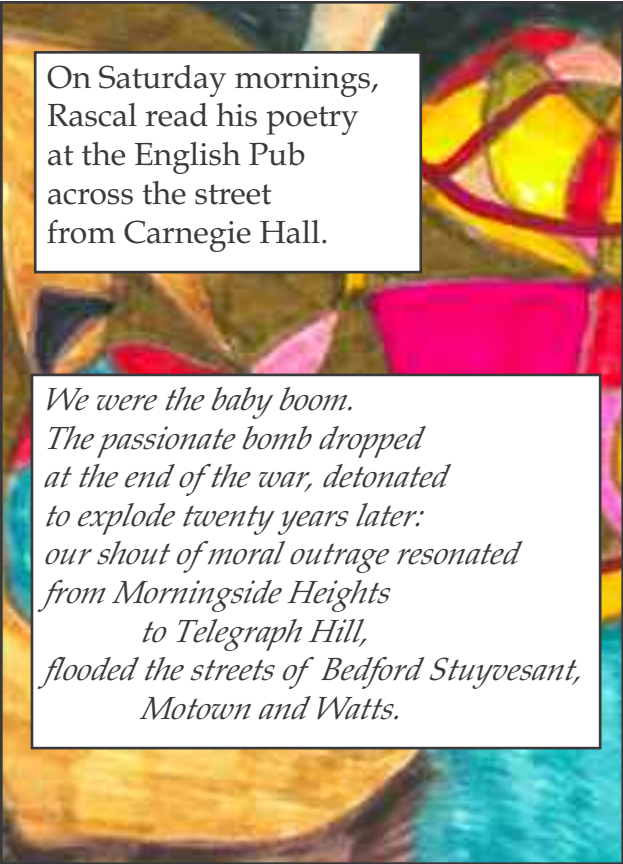
After the show, a critic stood up
to denounce Jeremy's staging.



The Arts Lab printed
Rascal's *Brittle Boots
and Army Ants*.


He hawked
the chapbook
in Central Park
and along Broadway.

*Fat Henry hobbles to
the star bar singing,
Jo pooh, jo pooh,
we're gonna screw tonight*



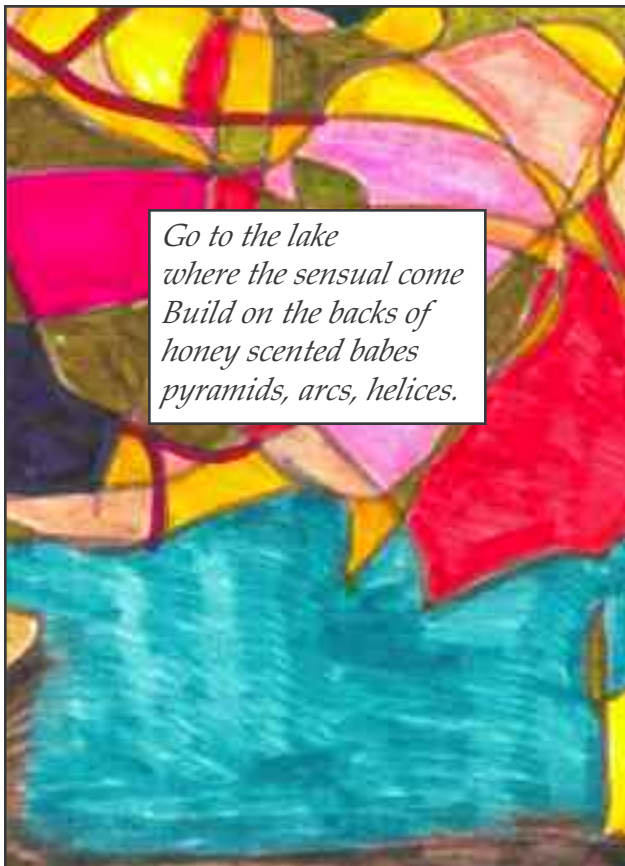
On Saturday mornings,
Rascal read his poetry
at the English Pub
across the street
from Carnegie Hall.

*We were the baby boom.
The passionate bomb dropped
at the end of the war, detonated
to explode twenty years later:
our shout of moral outrage resonated
from Morningside Heights
to Telegraph Hill,
flooded the streets of Bedford Stuyvesant,
Motown and Watts.*

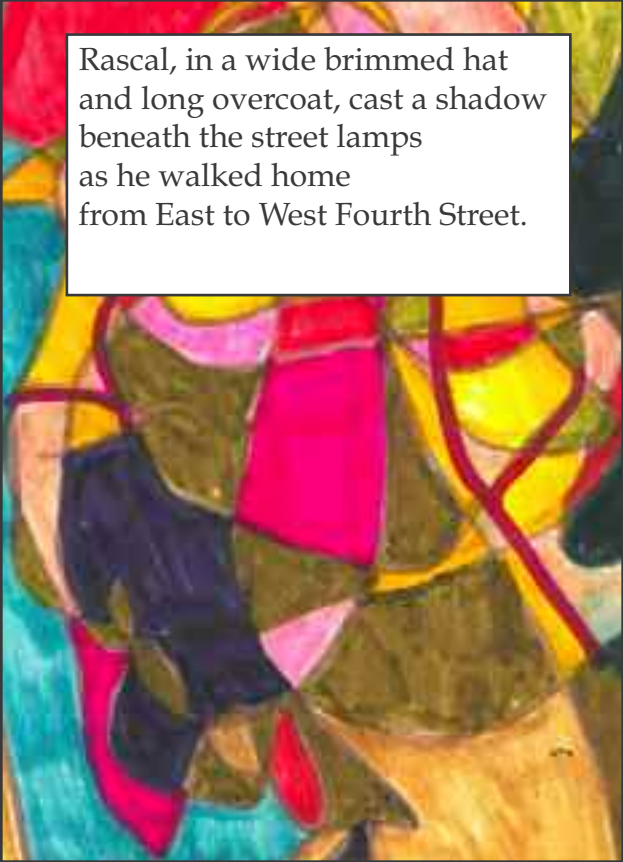


*Seek a path in heaven
Return a pebble to the beach
Name a child among the multitude*


After the abortion, Heidi choreographed a dance to Rascal's poetry.



*Go to the lake
where the sensual come
Build on the backs of
honey scented babes
pyramids, arcs, helices.*

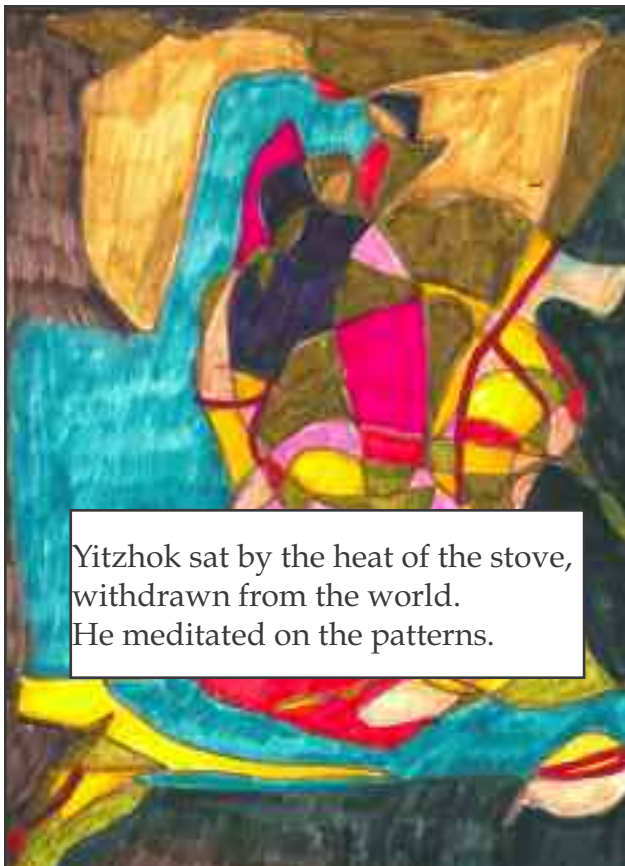


Rascal, in a wide brimmed hat
and long overcoat, cast a shadow
beneath the street lamps
as he walked home
from East to West Fourth Street.




Autumn oppressed.
Yitzhok called in a panic
and said, *You're*
the only one I can count on.
Please don't let me down.

Rascal slowly ascended
the dark, narrow stairwell.



Yitzhok sat by the heat of the stove,
withdrawn from the world.
He meditated on the patterns.

An abstract painting with a vibrant, multi-colored palette. The colors include dark blues, greens, yellows, pinks, reds, and a prominent turquoise blue at the bottom. The brushstrokes are visible and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth. A white rectangular box with a thin black border is centered on the page, containing a poem.

Misty morning sun rises
on a foggy Staten Island.
WQXR plays Chopin.
The dog nuzzles up to me.
Words twitch and turn.
Electricity flows about me.
Memories are stored in bytes
A storm approaches
with rains and winds. I wait.



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