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My Mother's Golem

Amanda VanNierop

She tells me over coffee, and I'm not sure where to look.

We're sitting at our kitchen table and the sun has already lit the backyard something beautiful. I listen to my mother tell me what I already knew, deep down.

I try not to wince.

I listen and I nod and I drink.

I imagine my mother as a young girl, feeling so much of what I feel now, wishing—desperately—as I often wish, that she had another, made from the same clay.

Should I have checked my mother's hands seconds after my birth,

I don't think I would have been surprised to find mud beneath the fingernails.

You are not a living thing. My mother points out the bluebirds resting on the feeder.

I sip my coffee.

My toes crumble in my sock.

Abstract/artist statement

This piece was composed for the 2020 Inspired By Showcase, where it received first place for undergraduate written work. The competition asked students to create a piece of art reflective of the themes in Michael Chabon's novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*.

Over time, the Golem has taken on varying symbolism both in and out of Jewish culture. To titular character Joe Kavalier, the Golem represents escape. Freedom. And, of course, protection. I wanted to express these central themes of the Golem in this piece, from the perspective of a daughter who is being told two things: literally, that she suffers from generational depression, and metaphorically, that she is her own mother's Golem. In this piece, I also wanted to express the idea of escape being limited. The mother can escape her feelings by bringing a companion to life, but this escape is finite—the daughter grows up to feel what the mother did. In a way, the cycle begins again.