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Zusya Whistles and Turns

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A guest in his friend Neskhizh's house,
Rabbi Zusya, a rumble in his chest,
lumbers from room to room sliding his fingers
over books, picking up candlesticks,
wondering, "What can I do?"
He lifts his yarmulke, uncomfortable
as a nest overturned on his head,
off and on, fanning his damp skull dry.

He remembers all he's been, all the work
he believed he must do.
He leafs through the great book before him.

With his head on the book,
his arms folded,
his yarmulke toppled onto the table,
Zusya sleeps, dreams he is a child
called to serve,
to ride horse on God's broad back.
He digs his heels into God's side —
nothing moves. He wraps his fingers
tightly around His neck, and feeling the cold
stone of a statue, he awakens,
bloWS through his lips
till a sound slight
as an old man's wheeze, whistles through.