

# Go Yonder and Worship, part 1

by Joshua Moses

I.

In the blue of the yard the twins boil and scrape,  
twisting about beneath the sycamore tree.  
his favorite in the red sweater, breath vapor in December air,  
carries  
in his strong right hand  
  
a sword  
unsheathed, wooden, felled in the snow of the previous week.  
“*On your guard,*” says he, the eldest, whirling unsteady through  
the drift as Jacob cowers before him, on the ready, prepared to take  
advantage of  
un  
stable  
steps  
stumbling now through powdery bluffs, Jacob feints  
and into the tree crashes June,  
scattering flakes across the fence and  
into  
the alley.  
A disaster.  
  
It is nearly the end of the year now, time to close the books on  
1988—  
to render an accounting  
totals in two columns  
praying that the numbers tie and  
that the final result

is black.

Ace ponders the vagaries of accrual,  
questions the inventory allowance for the forty-fourth time that  
afternoon,  
makes a decision at last  
    then scratches it out  
the twins' voices carry through the house, Mother's clattering  
    interrupted by interruptions,  
    "Mind your brother,  
    don't play too hard."

This is a kind of hell, these December weekends,  
a Sheol of depth uncomprehended,  
    a burial of spirits born and yet to be.

But these books, these books,  
they do not write themselves;  
and as the furnace rages in the bowels, the inventory still in  
question,  
    Ace compiles a list of grievances.

First, that God put him on this Earth;  
Second, that God made him work for his bread;  
Third, that God should see fit that, needing to work,  
    he should be set to work in his father's company,  
    a dire proposition, even in the best of families—  
this not being one of them.  
Fourth, that his eyes twitch gruesomely in the late evenings,  
that his wife ignore his pleas for affection,  
that his youngest son be a conniving little shit,  
that,  
    frankly,  
the whole Goddamn world is just one dire circumstance after  
another, between:

mortgages  
    car payments  
    pensions and insurance  
    taxes  
    fucking Reagan on the edge of retirement and Bush  
incompetent to take the seat  
    the whining noise the windows make when the wind blows  
    forty extra pounds around the midsection  
    property assessments  
    Linda, his idiot assistant  
    the whole state of the carpet business,  
        what with housing starts in the shitter

to only begin a comprehensive list.

it was not the way he planned.

the door crashes downstairs and the twins come clomping in,  
    Jacob in tears,  
    June seething, a red hot glow of justice in his cheeks.  
from above, in the office,  
    Ace hears a demanding of accounts:  
    “He started it.”  
    “Did not.”  
    “Did so.”  
    “He hit me.”  
    “He hit me first.”

Ending, as always, with June sent to think about it and Jacob  
carried upstairs,  
    wetting his mother's shoulder.

from his perch atop the house, Ace heard the pounding of nine-  
year-old fists,

June's unvarnished anger,  
and felt the blood flush his forehead,  
two bells of matching timbre,  
    one tolling, the other vibrating in sympathy,  
low amber notes of frustration giving way to the fever of a red-  
tipped dawn  
now to what end bear this wrath? unto commiseration, pity,  
despair—  
or down from the mountaintop, sparks blazing,  
to unbind the greater son, and set accounts right?

the droning of Jacob in the kitchen, halting, jagged like icicles, a  
surrender in the guise of victory,  
protected by the great heavenly beast called Mother,  
embraced and nurtured,  
brought forth a scene of arctic misery:  
an eternal winter, the earth glaciated;  
the snows drained of mirth, now only the great ceaseless quiet of  
frost draped over a continent.

at one time, Ace knew,  
where he sat was a beach, not fit for swimming,  
a thick slurry of crystal and mire at the edge of an ancient lake.  
How many thousands of years ago was it, this last Ice Age,  
when God saw that the tundra and ice left blue and white from  
here to

the

Mississippi?

A cold age, a feminine age,  
brittle, joyless, prim—  
    a Mother's age,  
where God's blessing was on the Few, the names forgotten,  
    picking through the light of an ember for berries, man an  
adjunct, an asterisk,  
together fortnightly to celebrate a kill

or else himself laid out flat on the emerald of the earth,  
red draining into the uncanny mouth of death.

and here on these brutal shores,  
the savagery mocked by the patience of motherhood,  
how many weaklings saved from the trials of the hunt by a  
sheltering hutch,  
a child suckling long after weaning age?  
drinking, quite literally, from the teat of others' efforts,  
draining lifeforce from the hunter, who risks  
dismemberment  
and for what?

for the sniveling cowardice of a hairless boy,  
plotting against his lion-maned providers.

in this house on the edge of the Pleistocene,  
where vermin stalk like rabid pickup trucks,  
Ace shimmers motionless as though stuck in time,  
listening to the howls of the burdened  
and the whimpering of the soft,  
and grinds his teeth.

the line which in the womb divided the boys  
divides them even further now  
into warring camps at times,  
even as they fought to enter the world they fight to remove each  
other from it.

June, Junior, older brother, like his father honest and broad,  
charming,  
an open spirit,  
willing to lift great boulders from the earth in his father's  
service—  
bearing their weight from his family and down into the garden.

guileless, faithful, strong, June carries hopes,  
a vision even,  
long walks through the woods at dawn,  
setting a place behind  
    a thicket  
            waiting  
no words now, just gestures, silent and warm, the world shrunk  
down to this  
tiny narrow scope,  
hearts beating together in the quiet mist of the early season—  
and even the cleaning of the carcass,  
a task rendered worthy by its fruits—meat, yes, pride something  
better:  
a pride that scattered Jacob to the closet to be followed by the  
taxidermist's dream of a  
    twelve  
            point  
            buck  
a pride that excluded that younger boy!  
Even as the sobs subside, they reverberate in Ace's ears,  
hearing not just this fit but one among an endless march of fits,  
tears of exalted terror from this one: not an earthbound  
steadiness for him, but  
a pneumatic spirit,  
pressurized and nervous,  
    captive in a body not entirely of his control.  
Jacob, seven kinds of strange, rattling, clever, dishonest,  
a mother's son, fairly drawn.  
to look at Jacob is to see not his own eyes but two faces overlaid:  
the boy's mother first,  
and then, deeper, his grandfather—  
a will o' wisp of a man,  
    conniver,  
    dishonest dealer,  
    sharp no question, in both senses—

quick to see and take advantage, fair or not (often not)  
provider even still after ten years in the grave.

