

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 life force 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,
settling 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.

