

## Jacob's Betrayal: A Midrash

*Rachel Atwood*

Jacob stood waiting for his bride. The music surrounded him as the village people feasted on the food Laban had put out for his daughter's marriage. A few men came over with a mug of beer and gave him a heavy slap on the shoulder and a bellowing congratulation. The men always liked to forget the hard work and enjoy themselves. The feast was grander than Jacob had ever expected from his uncle. Laban was a stingy pig. The beer and wine seemed to flow endlessly, and the food kept reappearing. This worried Jacob, for Laban was as tricky as a fox. This show of generosity without an ulterior motive. Jacob sighed. *Relax; you will have Rachel, all so beautiful Rachel. Sweet wonderful Rachel finally will be mine,* Jacob soothed himself. That did not stop the haunting feeling in his gut.

Jacob watched as the sun came down. The brilliant colors dyed the sky in colors only kings could wear. This was The Night. Under this regal sky they would be bonded forever. People started lighting lanterns, as the sun went beyond the earth. The lights sparkled in the magic of the night. The moon glowed high above, the greatest lantern of them all. As the magic of the night filled him, the haunting, foreboding feeling came back. Suddenly Laban appeared beside Jacob, and gave him a huge fatherly hug and started speaking in a hearty voice. "This man here is becoming my son tonight!" Cheers rang from the crowd. "Now I think we need my daughter to finish this off, don't you?" Laban gave Jacob a mighty hand shake and went back toward his tents to retrieve his daughter. *Rachel,* Jacob thought, savoring her feeling in his mind.

Rachel sat over the stove, cooking the food for her wedding feast. The heat burned her face. When would her mother send for her? *Father decides to have a huge feast to show his generosity, but his stinginess still is fully evident. He is making ME, the BRIDE, do all the work. Where is Leah anyway? She knows how harsh Father is. She should be helping.*

Rachel attempted to look through a crack in the tent without letting the lamb meat get dry. She had to know how long it was until dusk. Either the horrendous work was making the time painstakingly slow, or it was dangerously close to her wedding hour. Rachel trusted her sense of time, and was getting suspicious. Leah had promised to help with the preparation, and she wasn't here, and Rachel had made enough food to serve the whole country. *Or, Jacob, is it that I lust so much for you, so much, that one lamb shank seems as though it were a thousand?* Rachel scurried over to the tent opening. The sun was setting.

Rachel knew something was amiss. Her mother should have called her by now. It took more than an hour to be properly dressed to wed. Rachel needed to wash, dress in the new white robes, twine flowers in her hair, and put on the beautiful wedding veil. *And then bind myself to Jacob, she thought dreamily.* But this was not the time to dream, she needed to find out what was wrong. Rachel heard men's drunken laughter and merry song, as she walked quickly in long strides to the women's tent. She brashly pulled the tent flap open and gasped.

There stood Leah in Rachel's new white robes, hair twined in flowers, and mother placing on her head Rachel's own beautiful wedding veil. Leah swished her head to look straight into Rachel horrified doe-wide eyes.

"Rachel...I'm sorry."

"You...you..."

"Rachel, let me explain."

"Explain what? You..."

"You know father would never let you marry without me marrying first! You think I want to share a husband with you?"

"Share? Who said anything about sharing? You're stealing him. I should have known when you sneaked looks at Jacob and me that you wanted to steal him from me."

"Do you think I want to be married to a man who doesn't love me, but my little sister? I am doing this for you."

"How could you? You..."

Before Rachel could continue, Father appeared suddenly. "Come on," he beckoned to Leah, lifting up her veil to see what was underneath. Father smiled.

"You planned this, you..." Rachel slammed herself against her father's body. He knocked her to the ground. "If you leave this tent, you'll

never marry Jacob, ever, and I'll give you to old Terrom." Her father slammed his foot into her stomach, and turned around to lead the gasping Leah to the marriage ceremony. Their mother was nowhere to be seen.

Rachel lay, curled on the floor, her father's warning ringing in her ears. She would rather die than not marry Jacob, and marrying Terrom would be worse than death. He had three wives and was known to beat them all for the slightest misdemeanor or for no reason at all. Rachel squeezed her eyes shut, trying to ignore the pain in her stomach. She had to warn Jacob. He had to find out and stop this. She could not share a husband with her sister. She had always had to wear Leah's old clothes, always played second to her. Rachel would not be her love's second wife. She would not. She just needed to show Jacob the switch without her father noticing.

Jacob stood and watched as Laban led his bride toward him. He watched the woman's figure as it danced in the shadows of the moon's light. *Ah beauty, all wondrous beauty, an angel of God,* Jacob thought as the figure in white robes strode towards him. Then Jacob noticed something. The woman's gait was not quite as graceful as Rachel's, a bit longer and more handsome. *Maybe it's just a trick of the night,* Jacob thought, attempting to push the thought from his mind.

*A trick of the night!* For a moment he relaxed, but as the father and daughter walked through the moon's path, he noticed the white clad figure reached up to her father's chin. Rachel was only as tall as Laban's shoulder.

*It's a trick of the night.* Laban led the woman up to Jacob. At the corner of his eye he saw what seemed to be a ghost with a small lantern, blowing a kiss at him as Rachel always did.

*It's a trick of the night.* Jacob turned toward Laban and his bride.



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