
Isaac in the Dark

Hilary Tham

Of course Esau is my favorite. How not?
 When he is all the things I could never be:
 hunter, explorer, sinews like oak, voice
 like thunder dazzling all except his mother
 and brother with his fearless deeds.
 He is a man's man with hair on his chest,
 his arms, face, legs; the girls run after him.
 Women know hair means virility.

Jacob? Pah, he is everything I was
 except he likes being what I hated, what
 an over-anxious, over-aged mother,
 who never let me walk beyond
 the prison fences of her eyes
 and a god-driven father made me.

I have been a prisoner all my life,
 for my safety, my mother said.
 The one time Father took me
 on a trip, the divine madness took him.
 Perhaps he stayed sane only at home.
 Had it not been for a ram stuck in a bush

I would have died. *God help me,*
my father Abraham is mad. I knew it
 with the shaking of my heart,
 my throat shrinking from his knife's edge
 while he spoke to the air,
 drew blood
 from my throat.

Thereafter, I was kept close to home,
 even after my frantic mother died;
 home where the sand madness
 did not blow through his eyes.

When I would go forth to seek a bride,
 he sent his man, Eliezer, tall and dark
 in my stead. A man used to command
 while I... even the dogs did not fear me.
 How could Rebekah love me
 after months of his exciting company?
 He had traveled, seen places, things
 I only dreamed of seeing. I saw them
 talking, laughing at journey's end.
 From the moment she looked at me
 and fainted, I knew hopelessness
 and rage; she did not, would not love me.

Of course I love Esau. How not?
 My rash, impetuous, adventurous son
 who speaks whatever is in his heart.
 Esau who cannot deceive me, even if he tried.
 How could I not love him?
 I am Isaac, I have lived with lies
 from birth. They told me Sarah bore me.

Any fool could pierce that lie!
Jacob was Rebekah's child
from the day he was born, always
hiding things from me, guarding his tongue;
his words of love measured out,
grudgingly, the way his mother used
to dole me her nights.

Now that light is lost to my eyes
I *know* she lets her eyes linger on Eliezer's
sons, wishing they were hers.
Because I love Esau, she does not.
Because I love Esau, she whispers
he is not fit to head the clan.
Because I love Esau, he shall have
everything *and* his birthrights.



Hilary Tham is a Chinese Malaysian who converted to Judaism upon marriage to Joseph Goldberg. She is the author of *Paper Boats*, *Bad Names for Women*, *Tigerbone Wine*, and *Men & Other Strange Myths*. Her work has appeared in *Midstream*, *Gargoyle*, *Antietam Review*, *Metropolitain*, and other publications.