

Leaving Be'er Sheva

“take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriya and offer him there as an offering on one of the mountains which I will tell you about’ . . . And on the third day Avraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from a far.” (Genesis 22:2)

“whatever comes out of the doors of my house to me when I return . . . I will offer it up as an offering . . . And Yiftach came to Mitzpe to his house, and there his daughter came out to meet him, with timbrels and dances.” (Judges 11: 31-34)

Naive as a ewe flock I stood looking  
out over the Negev, facing North,  
judging the Judean hills’ white length.  
It took us three days journey walking  
to reach the peaks I see in the distance  
and the arid sands stretching out before us.

To sanctify our fate against the sky.  
The wadi’s clay confetti hue washes  
across windowsills, over eyelashes,  
copper dust mascara to frame the eye.  
In red bright iron the vision wavers.  
I dream that I am Isaac being offered.

As I stepped down to face the hazy light  
the dry desert air sliced across my eyes  
tinting all crimson with the flush of tears;  
red waves to swallow up the desert white.  
My vision came clear and I was seeing  
omens to visit an unnamed mountain.

O Yiftach, give me back who I was  
before the dance, before the white solstice,  
before the gleam of the slaughtering blade  
carved out our destiny in granite lines.  
Be’er Sheva gleaming in the light of dawn -  
Our schismed legacies becoming one.

Called Mount Moriya in verse and we followed  
to a place we were shown, toting incense  
wood and flame for the fire. The angels,  
the ram came later. We sought to hollow  
out a groove within the rock, to hallow  
that space we were given with our marrow,

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Field Trip to Museum Row

My eye catches on a curved  
scarab oval, encrested,  
a name stamp no larger than  
a Victorian button.

No starched shirt wearer carved this  
relic or that earthen vase  
from the city where I sprawl  
on the pedestrian strip,

Drinking Turkish coffee and  
seeking prophetic vision.  
Museums seem extraneous  
against Jerusalem white stones.

History itself lives here  
in ancient walls laid bare  
to stand against the noon sun.  
What can pottery shards say

To the capital's craggy  
and eternal legacy,  
the stubborn bushes that sprout  
from within the solid rock?

Cafe Shakhor

You take your coffee black,  
So pure that its ebony grains  
Suspend themselves briefly in the dark liquid  
Then filter down to form a rich mud  
At the bottom of your cup.  
It isn't a cup, really,  
But a lidded jar  
Which once held preserves.  
The lid makes it portable,  
And allows you to disperse  
The black essence  
Throughout a room.  
The dark fragrance of fertile soil  
Emanates from your jar.  
These black waters tell the story  
Of a desert nomad people.

The 'Azazel Goat

The ram returned to Jerusalem, wool  
wearing the occasional burr, here and  
there, ruin of its lie amid the bramble.  
Off the side of a hill in khaki-white sand  
thrown, jettisoned, a ram fell, tumbling  
in the myth of Sisyphus, a stone  
cascading down; horn, hoof, ram-lock blurring  
into Judean desert wadis. Bedouin  
legend grasses in dry riverbeds, springing  
up in white light dust, store dew. Rain  
comes seldom in this season, to this hill,  
where the smoke of the bulls mingles and  
the sweet incense loses itself  
in the crisp fruit of blinking succulents  
briars and thorns, grounding sky to soil.

Negev in Winter

The winds are cold and the summer ended.  
Hints of rain, your season commences.  
The shutters are coated with fine red dust.  
A dry storm is churning the sands.

You drift past the brief transition,  
An autumn brilliant and fleeting  
Gives way  
To winter grey shades. Clouds

Hover overhead in packs -  
White wolves -  
Dominate the sky. The dry  
Landscape becomes a flood path.

Streambeds abruptly flourish.  
Rainwater erodes canyons  
Deeper, scars its signature  
On solid rock.

The Call of Bells

I hear the carillon bells  
Chime the hour  
The way the fog  
Carries sounds  
Across my hometown  
From the university  
Bell tower, or  
The dawn muezzin  
Peals that ring  
Through Jerusalem  
With the odd bleat  
Of a sheep, a wandering  
Goat, a penitent kneeling  
In prayer. The elision of  
Sounds, a call to a city  
That beckons me home.