

SKELTON

MEDITATIONS OF A FATHER TO BE

The day the angel arrives:

Perhaps it started in the schoolyard. I couldn't see well from the back, you know. And the schoolmaster liked to use the front to keep an eye on problem students. One must instinctively be averse to being right beside someone who steals your lunch every day, I certainty was.

Then again, there was so much else to do. There was running to be done in the wilderness. Sand to be kicked up, a sun to lift one's face to, and the insects! Seeking them was the perfect scavenger hunt: first under the rocks, then into the crevices. To me, the desert behind my town was an endless brown sea of treasure. The classroom's silent drudgery simply could not compete for my attention! Even without perceptible noise, the desert was never barren of sound; and I liked nothing better than to listen. Just to stand on a rock, close my eyes to the sky, and listen for the faintest of breezes. Except, perhaps, to tell stories I had heard; whether from temple priests or from our servants. What use had I for the written word?

By eight, I could retell any of our servant's stories, often better than they could. By ten, I could recite most scripture-- it wasn't long after that when I left home to be properly taught by the rabbis.

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And then I met Elisabeth. Before he was an invalid, her father was a rabbi, and an imposing and talented one at that. Confined to his home for years, he had nothing better to do than to teach all his children how to read. And she loves to read aloud, every word from her mouth a prize. So, I didn't need to read or write; I had a world full of sound and could afford to neglect the printed shape of words.

Until a crowd of the most learned men I knew clamored around me, eager to hear my vision and stunned by my silence. Until my wife pushed a tablet into my hands, expecting to learn what had happened.

Two months after the angel:

Until my wife knew who was to bear the burden of god's will, and I was powerless to even beg her for answers. And she, equally questioning, could not understand why I would not simply write out my story.

I remember in separate, still facts. I had babbled out a question, and Gabriel's wings had unfolded, and I felt what I had lost. But it all seemed to happen at the same time, the response and the rebuke. I believe now. Shall I forever be lost for a second of disbelief? Two seconds?

I still don't understand why my belief mattered. It is Elisabeth who is descended from Aaron, from all the greats. From her comes the child's lineage

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and destiny. I was always just a mediocre priest, famously lazy to learn the newest rabbinic literature.

So why must everything be taken from me? My life is sound! The stories, the prayers: a chorus of voices stretching back in time immemorial. That is all I have ever known; my way, my life, my salvation.

Or is this what I must give up for him? To be allowed to father the second Elijah? (To be a father at all, I who was once secretly thankful for our barrenness!) Then, oh Lord, let the words I have lost fly up to protect him as you stitch together his form. Let the thoughts rattling uselessly within my heart escape to bring him peace and security.

Ten months after the angel:

By now, I have even suffered the humiliation of kneeling in a schoolyard. Its ludicrous, I'm too old a man to be squinting at letters. The whole town thinks I'm senile. But if I don't endure now, I won't be able to name him, and the child will be christened Zechariah.

He simply can't have my name, its not at all suitable for the magnificent figure he will be. These children – the great future prophets--are bringing glory and restoration. Perhaps even a release from Roman bondage. So, I would like to name him Elijah, just like the prophet he will become. For I

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must have misheard the angel, it can't really be John. For what is more  
ludicrous than a priest's name for a future prophet?