



SACRIFICE - [a Christmas Story]

Isaac's knuckles scraped across the rock, smarting. The burden on his back shifted forward, almost sliding over shoulders and taking his tunic with it. The tip of a rough branch dug into the nape of his neck.

"Steady, boy!" The old man's voice was ragged as he stumbled forward to catch his son from falling face first into the boulder. "You don't want to..." The voice trailed off to silence. "To what, my Father?" Isaac looked back under his arm to Abraham's weathered face. It seemed suddenly drained of color. The first glint of sunrise shone blood red in the patriarch's eye. He didn't answer the boy.

No. He's much more the man, now, thought Abraham. For how much longer? He suddenly felt a great urge to grip the boy with all the strength remaining within his right hand. To hold him fast to Earth. To anchor him to this rock and fight the heavens to keep him. The fading light of the uncountable stars mocked him.

"We will have him, now!" They seemed to say. "Your 'multitudes of descendants' will light the darkness, but **you** will never hold them!"

It still made no sense. It was a rift in the universe. The covenant shattered, to be revoked on an altar of betrayal. Yet Yahweh demanded it. Abraham lifted pleading eyes up to the stars, their cold light now swept away in the expanding pool of crimson. His only son rose, occluding the sun, its halo an ember around his head.

"Oh, God!!"

Isaac was greatly startled and reached back for his father, but couldn't see him round the load of firewood he carried. "What is it, Father?!"

The old man was weeping now. "We're almost there, Abba. Hold my hand."

Isaac reached behind blindly and caught the man's sleeve. He hauled himself, the load of wood and his father up over the face of stone. Panting, Isaac finally saw the sunrise. It was stunning. He looked at his

father. There was terror... or horror in his eyes.

“Father?” Abraham brandished his dagger, swinging it up through the cords that bound his son to the wood. They fell in a heap as Isaac swung his head to and fro, and rubbed out his sore arms.

“You look ill, Father. I know you haven’t slept or eaten in a day or more. Here – sit and have some broth.” He gently... firmly... lowered the old man to a sitting position. Abraham’s arms and legs quaked as his son removed the stopper and held the flask up to his lips. Abraham spat away the swallow.

“I will NOT eat or drink again! Not until...”

Abraham again fiercely stared at his son. Such a pleading, desperate expression Isaac had never before seen on that face – usually so calm and starry eyed. Isaac didn’t know what to say. He looked to the four points of the compass, expecting to see Lemuel approaching with the other herdsman, as they would usually lead the choice ram. Isaac knew his role, as keeper of the flame. The father to sacrifice; the son to consume; together to worship.

YHWH.

Isaac continued to look around, confused. There were no other camps, sounds, or signs of an approaching sacrifice. Something was amiss. He knelt down close to the patriarch’s face. He was whispering, muttering. What was it? Isaac leaned his ear close to the old man’s lips.

Breathe in... Yaahhh

Breathe out.. Weehhh.

Breathe, repeat. Breathe, repeat.

Was his Father failing? Or just in another of his spells? Isaac held his father’s face and brought it up to his. He held their noses together. Abraham continued to breathe the NAME on his son. Something was happening deep within the man. Isaac could feel the energy welling up within him like a boiling geyser.

“Where is the sacrifice, my Father? I’ll prepare it for you, if you are unable.”

At the word ‘sacrifice’ Abraham shuddered.

“Where is the sacrifice?”

Abraham broke free and jumped back, startled.

“Jehovah Jireh!!” Abraham cried out at the sky devoid of stars.

“Yes, my Father. God provides every sacrifice. But where is this one?”

Abraham swung up the knife in a flash. The unmatched Damascus steel, dull in parts, gleaming in others, reflected the sun’s rays in stripes of carmine. He held it high, pointing the tapered tip down at

his own heart. His arm flinched as if to strike.

“NO! My FATHER! You must NOT!!”

The man froze, cracked slowly and sank to the stone. An ocean of sorrow.

“I know, my son. My son, my son... I know I must not. I must give Him the sacrifice he requires...”

Now the tears would not stop and mingled with snot flowing down the long white beard.

“Then how do I help you, my Father?”

Isaac felt an unexpected, deep grief. The kind reserved for death. He felt as if he were losing his Father, as if he were evaporating before him. It was a horrid betrayal of fellowship and trust. What was stealing his father from him?

“Yahweh! Help me help him!!”

Abraham rocked on his knees – the butt of his glorious knife pressed into his forehead.

The rock below Isaac’s feet began to solidify below him, in him, through him. He was becoming the altar and the sacrifice at once. He marveled at the transformation. He began to see time itself passing over him like the mighty Jordan. Walls rose up and crumbled. Oceans of whispers and shouts swarmed around him, trailing behind their ghosts. Mighty palaces and temples encompassed him and fell away or were consumed in torrents of flame. The mountains around him trembled in mighty quakes and split, shedding fresh water from ancient depths.

Then all grew silent.

Isaac’s arms were raised as a mighty oak in worship, and the Sun passed before him. His long branches bowed to the One in the likeness of a man, a God that somehow enveloped within him, his father, Abraham. Isaac knelt in surrender.

“Bind the sacrifice, my Father, as required. It is prepared.”

Somehow, the old man rose to the task, with the cut cords in hand, binding the son’s feet and wrists. Isaac remained still, submissive, surrounded by the tinder of burnt offering. Every sinew of his body tensed like bowstring, ready to fire. He raised his eyes to his father, who seemed to withdraw into the center of the great Melchizedek – that Priest of life and death, beginnings and ends... and new beginnings. A great knife was raised and wrapped in light – a bolt and flaming arrow. Isaac willingly raised his soul to surrender, to submit to the blow.

A clap of thunder and thunderous voice struck them both **flat**.

Isaac heard steel clattering and singing off the stone near his head as the blow fell. A bolt far stronger than any steel blew straight into his soul. He watched it divide his muscle and sinew into a thousand, a million, a million of millions of souls. It carved the marrow from his bones and bore the blood into a billion new hearts. He followed as it pierced the heart of every cell and wrote the NAME in every scroll hidden within, repetitions of the holy letters, dancing around themselves in a ladder anchored in Heaven and Earth. Names from the NAME written in sequence to be revealed in their generations –

the names of his sons yet to be born. Revealed within him in every cell of his frame. Down they descended - Names foreign and familiar dancing to the song of their times. Prophets, Farmers, Shepherds, Warriors, Kings.

The shards of Isaac fell, slain and pulled through the very earth in the turbulent wake of the bolt. It launched them through the far side of the planet into night and orbit to rest among the stars. He followed the bolt's hidden, mysterious ellipse, great loops of gravity. He fell again to earth splitting kingdoms to the south and sundering seas to the east.

The bolt of Isaac swung again by the earth to witness great battles, dragging the frame of daylight to lengthen its shadow. Isaac could hear the roars of his descendants' triumph in the wake of his star.

He followed another great orbit as it skimmed the earth from below, braking its rotation and torquing the whole world in its course. He witnessed the shadows of another day reverse their course and resume up the steps of a great palace.

The bolt and Isaac returned again, sweeping the shadow of holy light across kingdoms where the names within Isaac sojourned; the bolt blasting words of the Most High on palace walls. Walls of a golden Empire between the great rivers. A kingdom holding his children captive.

In every descent the star of Isaac showered the dust of the names, each generation pouring forth from him and scattering across the earth. He fell again to alight on a shepherd boy, an anointing eternal. A double trinity of starry points carried the name up into Isaac's cloud, the name of his son and king – David.

Isaac and the star of David rose again. From far beyond the orbit of omens, the double star of Isaac and David sojourned, waiting. And then, they fell again.

Another ephemeral city stood below the star, and within it the seed of this chosen king of David's line. Mighty, Eternal and Righteous to save the nations. A Magnificat arose from angels and shepherds at the revealing of a new Melchizedek, born within the earth to a virgin. A tune they learned from the maiden they attended. This newborn, a lamb; an offering to YHWH; a gift to the flocks. The sound of trilling thrums continued, multitudes of other angels rushing to see what had come through Isaac and his son. The Star of Isaac and David collided with the earth piercing a cave, a stall, then the heart of a baby. It continued its rush through earth into another great arc.

Isaac and his kingly son flew again from earth. They fell again, gaining speed. The Sacrificial Bolt, Isaac and David together swept up the multitude of stars behind them as they all fell at last, and finally, upon the very spot where the vision began. The bolt struck wood and nails and flesh and stone. Isaac's mind collided with this final sacrifice, his shattered soul and a billion shards of stars scattering across the ground. Slowly, some strange magnetism gathered him back together, piece by piece, name by name, soul by soul, the future seed of that starry host.

Isaac was whole once more, consumed and resurrected upon the altar. Slowly, his consciousness returned to his own 'temple' and he gazed upon the unbloodied steel lying next to his Father. The bolt was spent and there was no more.

Isaac could hear the rustle of a struggling ram in the thicket below him. He looked down at his father, still prostrate before him. He lowered his hands, still bound, to his father's neck and kissed his head.

"The Lord has provided, my Father. Arise."

With only tears to speak the words of gratitude, they celebrated life and the promise of it. The ram a sacrifice and symbol and feast.

Isaac led his Father down the mountain to find the place where the ultimate sacrifice would ultimately lay, cradled in a mother's arms – one of Abraham and Isaac's own daughters. And there, they finished their worship in the fading light of day. They arose to journey home under a sweep of stars uncountable.

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