

The New Book of Jonah

Jonah scrambled up from the bottom of the sand pit on all fours, hands clawing through the cover of moss for the comfort of something beautiful, anything beautiful, an Impressionist landscape, a Whistler Nocturne, a flying dream, just not the reality in the sandpit of how monsters were made.

What he remembered was a small kitchen harshly lit by a single bare bulb hanging from a wire above a small table with a white Formica top with gold spackles, silver molding around the edge. He remembered the sound the can of Old Style beer rolling across the floor incredibly amplified like thunder, the sudsy contents spurting out like horse urine underneath the refrigerator. How in the hell was he going to clean it out from under there? How was he going to clean that lousy beer up once it had soaked into all the dust balls, cat fur and probably a dead, desiccated mouse or two?

His "dad" had been holding the can when he hit him in the back of the head with the pool cue. "Pool cue!" That was a good one! So was pool table. Pool table is what he saw and there were rack upon rack of pool cues along the wall but that was all hysterical blindness like the fucking *Blair Witch Project* and you have your face to the corner of the room with the unbearable smell of something dead in the black plastic bag at your feet wafting up and you turn and look out across the deck toward the witch or

the child rapist and all there is a big five gallon bucket of Sikkens stain, # 23 second coat, Natural.

Oh, yeah, and way out there is the guy with the white pickup cutting all the firewood at the end of the driveway but he's so far away you can't really see him. Pick up one of the "pool cues" from the wall and it all but vibrates in your hand and you hear the word "FEAR" whispered in your head and suddenly there is a baby of it inside your stomach and you do not know how it got there but you wake up in the electrified swimming pool at school with your teacher glowering down at you wondering how many shock treatments it will take before you stop remembering how the prophecies get in.

The can must have flown from his hand as the fireplace poker or the biggest, heaviest pool cue stove in the back of his foul fucking head like a rotten pumpkin down in the garden. Jonah didn't remember which weapon he had used nor the blow, though his hands still vibrated from the absolutely profound, skull crunching satisfaction of it like a proof in Logic and then the brain matter chalk dust pouring out. For some reason he remembered wings, huge multicolored wings with turquoise eyes in them, like some Medieval master's Archangel Michael, fluttering in the throes of death—just goes to show what you can hallucinate when you're an Art History Graduate student under stress! You dream up the father raping you has wings like Blake's Elohim! There was so much blood and it wasn't really

red, but an icky puce color. How in the hell was he going to clean it up? It was all over the Braques and the Monet haystacks in their multi-colored Impressionist glory but most of all it was all over the thousands upon thousands of Garden of Eden scenes done by practically every slave artist since time immemorial. "Masters" some of them were called! Blood, puce colored blood all over the Michelangelo version in the ceiling and the Bosch version in the triptych and all the rest of them. A big dead angel lying there in the middle of all their false scholarship about the apple, The Temptation, the Fall, the "knowing," the snake, but most of all about Michael, the Archangell. Oh, how Jonah knew Michael! Rather, how Micheal knew Jonah. "Knew him" the way the Sodomites supposedly wanted to know the angels. A billion people or more have that all backwards.

Knew Michael's sword or his lightning bolt of an erection creating the God spot in his brain telling him things, ordering him to say things, making horrible words that hurt like fiery semen come out of his mouth for some new prophecy of plague or world war -- that's what he remembered but he couldn't mention it when Constable Melville questioned him later about the big dead bird in the Garden.

Hell? What hell?

Demons? What demons! Rape by musical instrument? Don't be ridiculous! A murder of crows in the attic? The voodoo invasion of your childhood? None of these things were real, meant anything up on the decks

of the Scholarship. That's why he was running, so he didn't have to remember what really happened down there. No, that wasn't really it, he needed even now to try to be accurate. It might be important later at his trial.

He, his "dad" was sitting at the kitchen table drinking his damn Old Style messing with Jonah's notebook. It wasn't enough that he messed with him at night in his bed, now he had to do it in the daylight for everyone to read! The reality of it pressing down on him in the night when he was little, spreading his legs, coming in, training him to be ridden by the electric thing that was to come in later and say things through him became more than a dream before he was ten. But now here the fucker was at the table with Jonah's notebook spread out in front of him. He didn't look exactly like his dad sitting there. In fact, Jonah didn't know exactly who he looked like except he wore a tight cleric's coat and collar with two comical white bibs. His full face with large nose hardly resembled his father's rather rugged but handsome face. Because he was wearing a peculiar black hat he could not see whether he had his father's curly white hair he was so proud of, "Pretty good, huh!" his father would mock bending down for all to see his full head of hair, "pretty good for a 63 year old, eh?"

How in the hell had he come from that man? Had he? Really? That crazy, self-proclaimed Christian prophet who had built a damn church on a vacant lot with 2400 cement blocks laid himself because he heard God's

voice whisper "build it and they will come?" How had he come from this man who practically introduced himself with the phrase "Jesus is victory" and then improbably asked, "do you want to see me speak in tongues?" It didn't matter what you replied, yes or no, because you got treated to his blurt of blather whether you wanted to hear it or not. And then he would lay his big hand on your shoulder, stare meaningfully into your eye and proclaim, "God must have meant for me to have you,"

Jonah figured maybe his intense interest in the hells of Hieronymus Bosch came from him, that man -- he sure believed in hell! Hell for homosexuals, hell for Moslems, hell for atheists, hell for the poor women who danced at the "Gentleman's Club" near Trego and hell for the men who watched the women. Hell for all the Sodomites in Sodom and Gomorrah who wanted to have sex with the angels, just not hell for Lot for giving them his daughter instead. He came from that sort of upbringing didn't he?

Didn't he? He must have.

Somehow he had to escape it, or he was trying to escape it, write his own beginning into the Eden of a liberal university where such hells only existed in the fevered imaginations of Medieval painters like Bosch whose images of rape and buggery by musical instruments you tittered about effetely as you studied them and learned, oh so tediouskly, these images were merely Christian proverbs illustrated to the nines. Not factories. Not factories for the creation of monsters. The Triumph of Death, was that a

Christian proverb? You did not dare suggest things in Bosch paintings corresponded to anything real like how the impulse to murder someone got in via musical instrument up your ass a demon was playing to say nothing of the voices plaguing your roommate the schizophrenic telling him to gargle with razor blades or to push that person in front of the subway train. No, the roots of mental illnesses like schizophrenia were definitely not down in those tortures and torments of the damned that existed in the warped imagination of a religion crazed little man, not in our modern scientific wonderland they didn't!

What about that rather harried looking guy making his way through the crowd of Ensor masks toward the mushroom clouds? What about him? Maybe that's who his father really was? Huh?

Maybe that's why Jonah had a vision one night the whole damn campus was one giant Aztec pyramid of human sacrifice with a little booth up on top where the chancellor handed out lots, draft lottery numbers about who got to remain on board the scholarship and who got tossed off into the whale mouth of war in order to quell the storm of student protests rocking the boat. The place was not a university, rather a temple, a vast religious complex that protected the Mysteries like the word "to know" while sacrificing the ones who wanted to know.

Jonah was probably screaming as he scrambled up the sand hill on all fours where he used to make marble runs with his brother. He didn't

remember he was fleeing the army of red words that invaded his childhood bedroom. It's not that he didn't want to say them, which he didn't, it was that they were not his!

He clawed his way up the undercut bank scratching belly and thighs on jack pine roots exposed like monster claws when the sand collapsed down into the pit. He could still feel the slimy red words leaking down between his thighs. By this time he really didn't much remember ever having been a man. He was becoming Eurydice or Rosemary. No he wasn't, he was leaving them behind, down there somewhere in death. Forget them! Let them fade back down into the darkness of the pit of Ellie Arroway's 18 hour amnesia! He looked up and the slope of the sand hill seemed to go on forever. In fact a short ways above him there was snow and then far above that on the lip of the Berkeley Hill what appeared to be a hospital. If he could just make it there he would be safe and this sand pit the unknown and unknowable in Bishop Berkeley's philosophy. Behind the hospital towered some vast mysterious mountain like Shasta or the Matterhorn-- did he have to climb it to get well? But then it all faded and he was sitting in Emergency waiting to be seen by someone who would -- he hoped -- commit him..

There was a path somewhere on top of the sand pit that led to the North Marsh Road—there was a path up here made by deer hooves and kids' feet, kids who leapt from the top of the pit down into the warm womb of sand to scramble back up to do it again and again, leaping, almost

flying—but hysterical and in the dark he could not find it—didn't even try to find it—instead crashed blindly ahead through low scrub oak and hazel brush. Just for an instant he looked back at the bottom of the sand pit but they were changing the story into something about Martians, lightning bolts and war machines that burst up from beneath the ground, creating a screen memory—not things like 91120012996 whispered in your garden. Did men have gardens? No men had mail boxes where God left Missals. This was when Jonah found the man sitting at his kitchen table writing in his notebook without Jonah's permission.

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: **2** “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

3 But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

4 Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. **5** All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. **6** The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.” **7** Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. **8** So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”

9 He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

10 This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)

11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”

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12 “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. **14** Then they cried out to the Lord, “Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased.” **15** Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. **16** At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.

17 Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Bullshit! What unspeakable bullshit! How to save your rapist ass! How to write your very own alibi!

That was when Jonah swung the pool cue or maybe it was a fireplace poker? He wasn’t exactly sure he remembered which it was. The fellow who was changing his notebook, changing the story of what had happened to his version didn’t even cry out when the poker slammed him in the back of the head. He just went down, his head smashed in like a rotten pumpkin.

At least, that was what Jonah remembered.

Joppa, hell, he wasn’t fleeing to Joppa. He was fleeing down the Mars Road to get away from the voodoo invasion of his childhood bedroom by Johnny Favorite, aka “God.”

He had been fleeing for years, his whole life, in fact. Fleeing because he knew how monsters were made, how demons were raised from the pit of Nether Hell which looked just like Hieronymus Bosch's Musical Hell. Art History scholars still marvel at how brilliant Bosch's images are, how inventive, just how far the guy would go to illustrate a proverb or Parable about the straight and narrow without once, ever suspecting they were looking at the war machines buried in the ground, throughout history raised so violently by Spielberg's lightning bolts in his blind movie. Yeah, Bruegel had it right, "The Blind Leading the Blind."

Killed his father?

No, he killed a lie. It lies there on the kitchen floor, fake blood leaking under the refrigerator, the false dream of the book of Jonah still fresh on the page of his notebook on the table.