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## Joshua: A Short Lament

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## Joshua: A Short Lament

I.

When I was born my brother held me, and then he grew older, and grew a goatee, and shaved it off, and grew a new one, and I grew a moustache (but it never grew thicker than a shade of dark green) and still he held me. He held me with one hand when he had to smoke a cigarette, and in another when he tied his tourniquets and filled up his syringes. He held me and I grew. I grew to weigh 200 lbs and then 4 tons and then 4 million massive bulbous tons, straining every muscle in his workaday body. Still he carried me, carried me to work at all those restaurants, all those family gatherings (where my weight somehow grew even more), all those nights out with friends that our mother warned him about, dark rooms, strange cities, dim lights, and he had to explain that that ginormous ball of fat in his arms was his younger brother, but eventually he stopped explaining and all these shadowed friends pretended not to see me and they slapped pills in his hands and he swallowed them with tap water. Until one blue day at the end of April I grew to such a mountainous size that my brother could no longer hold on and he dropped me and it shook the very foundations of the earth and all my family toppled over and died for a little while and then got up and realized that it was not us who had died but it was my brother...—lying on a bed in Detroit (maybe needle in arm, maybe a pain pill dissolving in his stomach, I never found out) surrounded by strangers, eyes rolling away, spirit smearing into someone's dirtied sheets, voices ghosting around him, swimming in and out of his ears, and I lay there, taking up all the space in the room, stealing all of his oxygen, thieving all of his thoughts. Then his dear friends, those faithful companions called EMTs to the scene and the EMTs cut a hole in his throat to try and help him breathe, but they did not realize he was a Sisyphus relieved.

II.

And you. You who made me a promise, whom I made promise me. You liar. Now you now see, heaven or hell, your eyes are open and you now see. Your mother gurgles and weeps and spits into your bed and inhales your blankets, and your stepfather tries to hold her, tries to hold all of us. Your older sister is torn apart by the Furies, limb from limb, biting her skin and her heart, her poor abscessed heart, because she looked back, she dared to look back, she dared to call your phone, your damn phone you sold for 30 dollars in the twilight hours. And neither of them can see any of us for the shade of you that hangs in

their eyes. Your younger sister wears your New Era cap and gives everyone tissues because she hates the sight of snot. Your younger half-brothers play in the front yard, but the older one, his eyes are red. Your father, your father who believed more than all of us, your father questions God, and he questions your vision you explained to him in church this past Sunday (where you were high), and said that you spoke to God Himself. Your stepmother tries to stay busy. Your grandmothers show us baby pictures of you and your grandfathers are at a loss for words. Your niece doesn't even know yet. And me? Oh I. Well you know, don't you? Doing what you taught me, trying to hold things together, trying to hold them together but in the end it doesn't work, because they think too much like human beings, they don't see the immense power of love, they fail to comprehend the infinite God that binds us all together into one fabric, and so they think in differences and philosophies and old bitter hates and old sins and holiness and unholiness (thinking you were never prone to), and they create chasms, each from each. So I delete your number from my phone. So I take your oldnew Bible (name embossed in gold on the front) that you never opened. So I type out some stupid words because it feels better than talking. A word is a dead thing, like a body that they say you are (but you're not are you?), a body that used to carry a spirit of meaning that is long gone now. But look at me: your younger brother now must make a life out of dead things.

III.

Who are You that shaped him in the womb? Who are You that birthed his first cell, that drew this sperm to that egg? Who are You that wrote his first breath? Who are You that wove together that first eyelash? Who are You that knew each hair upon his head? Who are You that crafted that little toe? Who are You that touched his fingers with Your own infiniteness? Who are You that taught his eyes to see, his bones to hold, his chubby feet to walk? Who are You that inlayed a tongue for him to speak Your praises? Arms to be uplifted? Tear ducts to weep? A heart to pound? A mind to never comprehend Your fullness? Who are You and What are You? Are You What they say You are? Who are You that crafted his soul from starlight and holyspit-swirled mud? Who are You and where are You, that laid down the foundations of the earth? That rent darkness from light and raised up those trees and all the living things? Where are You that sprung up man from the dirt and breathed life into him? Where are You that decided that that breath should one day end? Where are You that carved the Law into stone and Grace into Your Son's flesh, that bathed the world in a flood, that split the Red Sea? Where are you O Mighty One? Where are You

that stopped the Earth from spinning for Joshua, but was powerless to stop him as he lay in that bed and lost himself to unholy dreams and visions, never to awake? Where are You, Whom was powerless against his will? And where are You that said "I shall never leave you nor forsake you?" Where did his spirit go, where has it roamed? Did You watch it go or did he come home? Oh Father whose eyes never rest, where is my brother? Where did he go?

IV.

I love you, Joshua. Wherever you are, I know at least that you can hear me. I love you. Only God, and maybe you now, can fully comprehend how much I love you. I loved to make you laugh, I loved to drive in the car with you, I loved your pragmatism, I loved your servant's heart, I loved the way you joked with Milena and made her feel invited, I loved the way that you loved our darling niece, I loved watching TV shows with you, I loved hearing your voice on the phone, I loved sitting beside you in church, I loved how we were the two sanest people in our family because we weren't afraid to laugh at our foolishness. I loved you even when you were high, and you got paranoid and your words had a bite to them, I loved you even when you promised me, you *promised* me, not a few days before you died, that you weren't getting into this stuff again, I loved you then, Josh, I loved you when you couldn't speak coherently, I loved you when you couldn't walk up the stairs straight, I loved you when you lied to me again and again and again, I loved you when you tried to get up off the couch and you fell right on your face and slept that way, and I covered you in a blanket, and I should have covered you in a thousand blankets and captured you there on the floor so you couldn't move, and you would sober up, and we would play video games together again. But these college fiction classes teach you not to be cloying or maudlin, so I'll stop trying to bury you in words.

