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The Binding of Isaac

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candlelight caught in sweat which beads between the soft
rise of your breasts, whose envy turned a blind eye as
flames ate their way up those stairs now decades gone.
Whose mercy flung out an unseen net to hold you dazed
but unharmed, your breath dark as the underbellies
of rain-laden clouds. The thrum of your heart like
an ovation. Like thunder.

THE BINDING OF ISAAC

Perhaps it was a voice like ten-thousand bowstrings
drawn tight as a well-kept secret, a sound which rose

from a nimbus of flies that vexed the inarticulate
tongue of a sacrificial dove. Or perhaps it was

the unanswering stillness when woven garlands,
grain, gems, lay strewn in elaborate temples,

salvation's map withheld for want of a throat opened
wide as a traitorous smile~whatever could possess

a father to take in one hand, fire, the other, a curved
blade, bind his beautiful son ankle to wrist,

ankle to wrist, cuffs of blood circling bone like
bands of gold as morning unbolted the crimson sky.

Then there was only the rough stone altar. No voice
appeased by blind obedience. No swift and

muscular angel summoned to stay the gnarled hand.
Just a young man curled around the shape of his breath,

his long brow, abrupt chin, familiar as the rasp
of sand against yellowed teeth, the truth of what

we will and will not do for love. Sometimes what's
miraculous is what's most purely human. That morning

the old man turned away from promises of a perfect world
in favour of one whose flaws could not obscure

its simplest joys~the small warmth of the boy's hand
on his father's breast, tender flesh perfumed with

sweat and sunlight, how the caged bird of his heart
beat fiercely in its mortal keep, the single shadow

their bodies pushed across fallow ground, even the
remnant fear which saw them free a ram tangled in thicket,

cast it upon unbloodied stone, its mild eyes rolling
white as fire unteased its matted fleece, burnished

each cracked hoof and spiralled horn, gave it black
wings with which to fly to a heaven blacker still.

LIKE WATER

which cannot break its
contract with earth, the
immortal rising and falling,
shreds of mist
called home by sunlight,
thunderclouds torn asunder
in wind, or the way, before
rain, air smells like
jars of bright pennies and
the need to be spent.
What lives holds its breath
until the sky opens like
hands unfolded in prayer, or
answered prayer, and each