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Sex in the Bible: A Poetic Female Retelling

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I'm not supposed to be here.

*I'm the midrash mansplained by rabbis who
contradict their own writing—and so they made me,
A Demon*

*It's kind of badass when you think about it. At least it's better than being a
slave girl who gets raped girl who gets
cut up, thrown away with no name girl.³³⁸*

*I was not supposed to be in your narrative; but, because of a mistake, they went
back to first base and pitched a prequel that makes Genesis look like a sad sequel
and so, I'm alive.*

and still, I'm alive.

Since He, for some reason, made woman twice³³⁹

*Eve doesn't get to give you advice
as the first female embodiment of vice.*

*I'm the one who stole the show before it even began
and have been watching you whores and widows and witches and womb-wasted wenches
from my box seat, throwing popcorn at the stage with every fragile turn of a page.*

Because this story doesn't belong to us;

and neither do our thoughts, and neither do our bodies.

As the malevolent maiden stuck within the margins of midrash,

I don't like the way this story looks on paper.

*That's why they forced me in while writing me out; I was too loud
whenever I took pity on the victims of rape culture*

*The slave girls, Zilpah and Bilhah. I pitied Hagar
she had to sleep with a man*

who was eighty-six years old, and I³⁴⁰

³³⁸ Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds, *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). (Judges 19:29).

³³⁹ “And God created man in His image... male and female He created them” (Gen:1:27); “And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman...from man was she taken.” *Ibid.* (Gen. 2:22-23).

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.* (Gen. 16: 16)

twenty two, I think
no one thought to write down my birthday
but in a dream, a bird told me I'd hardly seen twenty suns
when Sarai handed me over
I thought I would die.
I screamed the whole time. Each time, every time
I wanted to die, and so I asked God Why—
In the end, they threw me out
but then He Promised me and my Ishmael the world
for carrying on Abram's line.³⁴¹
But I don't give a damn about Him;
He never gave a damn about me.
I am but the first storybound
slavegirl used as a surrogate sans consent;
Take the sororal competition between Rachel and
Leah, the one without beauty, the one without love,
*God opened her womb*³⁴²

And yet I'm still unloved.

I had to pay my sister in mandrakes just to take my husband—our husband— to bed.
I remember the first time,³⁴³

I walked down the hallway past prayers and empty tables
the Feast gone, the Fruit, Eaten.

Daddy shoved me in a room before I could think lights out//knives out

I didn't know until he breathed Rachel in my ear
and I realized the wrong that was happening

because this wasn't the first time Daddy shoved me into a stranger's bed

I used to block it out, the smell like rotting meat

I stopped praying for a while, stopped feeling

But with Jacob, he kissed my

chest and told me he Loved me in private for so long

and getting swallowed up in all that Love, even when it doesn't belong
to you

he couldn't tell the difference between us under the dark sky and red wine—
I didn't know what to think or feel, awakened by a strange fever, held by the grip of
Guilt

//I'm sorry//I'm not sorry//I'm sorry//

The next day he awoke beside me—a sight for sore eyes
worked seven more years just to

³⁴¹ "Hagar bore a son to Abram." *Ibid.* (Gen. 16:15)

³⁴² *Ibid.* (Gen.29:31)

³⁴³ *Ibid.* (Gen. 30:14-16)

fuck my sister, who's still bitter that Daddy shoved *me* in that room when I³⁴⁴
wasn't even ready in the first place.
Not that it mattered; he wouldn't've asked me if I wanted to anyways³⁴⁵
no one would. But I'm a mother. I should be glad and thank God. I'm a mother with
a family.³⁴⁶
What's a family without love?

Everything, dear sister.
I am no one until I've made someone
even if they aren't truly mine
I feel guilty, I do, I think about
the girls I send to consort with him under my name, I imagine them lying³⁴⁷
stiff beneath his body, wrinkled and sweaty
he's getting old, you know
but if not me, then maybe God can fulfill them³⁴⁸
And you don't think I'm pissed with Dad too? I loved him once, both of them,
but that was before we were treated like cattle—and now,
Now, I am known for a trait that only fades with time,
I'll lose my hold on the desire I once kindled so easily in my youth
and he'll turn his favor to the one who gave him children, a family, a legacy³⁴⁹
What's love without a family?

Why's sex always got to do with marriage and babies?

Maybe it has nothing to do with that at all;

just ask Delilah, she reinvented

*knowing someone in the Biblical sense, if you know what I mean\$\$\$ If you read my
story and
didn't know how to interpret it, just take it as is, baby, because that's how it was,
baby, alright?
;;BDSM!! My story ain't poetry, don't you dare make me into no allegory+++Don't
make no*

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (Gen. 29:27-28)

³⁴⁵ Sandie Gravett, “Reading ‘Rape’ in the Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of Language,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28, no. 3 (2004): 279-299.

³⁴⁶ Yafeh-Deigh discusses the ancient Israeli belief of “a woman’s deep-seated desire is to be blessed with children” and the association of womanhood with motherhood. Alice Yafeh-Deigh, “Children, Motherhood, and the Social Death of Childless Women: The Social and Theological Construction of Infertility in the Hebrew Bible and in Cameroon,” *Biblical Interpretation* 28, 5 (2020): 612.

³⁴⁷ “Consort with her (...) through her I too may have children.” Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*. (Gen. 30:3)

³⁴⁸ Yafeh-Deigh describes reproduction as a blessing necessary for God to bestow upon a woman. Yafeh-Deigh, “Children, Motherhood, and the Social Death of Childless Women.”

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 61.

metaphor out of it@Samson's kinky as hell and just begged me to tie him down; so I did%³⁵⁰

When he was looking, I used rope, and when he wasn't###

How could I know anyone was looking? Please don't
please don't assume I was using I couldn't've known

I shouldn't say it out loud they might overhear and I'm afraid
The only reason I went, I—

*You can't say no to a King*³⁵¹

and and I know that
everyone knows this or at least it's generally understand

and yet some people still find me promiscuous
but it wasn't really a choice it was an order, a command³⁵²

and if I didn't go, something worse might've happened
and so when he looked over, I pretended to be pleased, utterly enamored

afraid of what might happen otherwise

and then the baby came creeping inside and

I had to tell him as soon as I knew before he accused me of being a harlot³⁵³

But then something bad did happen—

When he couldn't convince Uriah to come³⁵⁴

He sent him back to the

and now he's because of me.

And now I don't there's no one else I whose baby
there's no way out other than through.

I'm scared of the man who calls me Queen.

He strokes my hair at night with a calloused hand,

I stare at the ceiling, wishing the damned baby had died instead of him

died while still inside

instead of tasting life just to abandon me too³⁵⁵

They wished they were dead; but that would be too merciful.

*Instead, He forces them to bed, turns their bodies into lead until their sheets run red
but when she will not wed, His wet wishes waste away like wine in womanly wombs*

And he Defiles her.

God, the male colonizer

Whipping Widows like Beasts, but when Zion herself speaks:

³⁵⁰ Berlin and Brettler, *Jewish Study Bible*. (Judges 16:7-17)

³⁵¹ Gravett questions definitions of rape in the Biblical context where women are possessions of male households, suggesting that a woman's body is never own to give away. Gravett, "Reading 'Rape.'"

³⁵² Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*. (2 Sam 11:4)

³⁵³ *Ibid.* (2 Sam 11:5)

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.* (2 Sam 11:9)

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.* (2 Sam 12:18)

Mercy, have mercy, have
 You are my Lord, you are my Ruler, my Conqueror my God my³⁵⁶
 Please I beg you Stop
 I know the wrong I have committed, I’m sorry, I’m sorry
 Have mercy, please please
 You’re choking me you’re
 and I can’t breathe my neck—*whiplash*—your hands³⁵⁷
 You’re hurting me, it hurts
 *Stairs*one two**crack***one two three****
 You’re right You, you’re right I was unfaithful I repent, have mercy have
 *Sizzle*Iron*like Fire into my bones³⁵⁸*
 Mercy please my clothes nothing more to burn
 I’m sorry I fell into Temptation³⁵⁹
 Just don’t let them see. Please, just don’t, don’t³⁶⁰
 not my daughters, not Judah she’s³⁶¹
 sleeping. i was sleeping when he told me to
 get out of bed, get out of bed, pjs on, get out of bed and on your knees, and it
 hurt and i saw mommy crying and i dont know why she lets the bad man stay in her
 bed³⁶²
 i cant crawl into her bed anymore when i have bad dreams
 and he hurts me when i spill his drink because the mug is too heavy to carry and
 i wish he would stop the games, i dont like the games
 ready or not here i come
 but i dont want to play anymore because whenever he finds israel
 I told him to get his hands off of me. Get his filthy hands off of me because I am not
 his daughter
 I am nothing to him, he’s not even my Father
 He told me I was a whore for dressing like this
 I guess it was time to pay. I guess it was time to

³⁵⁶ In regard to the feminized cities, God is the male abuser (father, husband, love). Rachel F. Magdalene, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses and the Ultimate Tests of Terror: A Study of the Language of Divine Sexual Abuse in the Prophetic Corpus” in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner-Idan (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995): 326-352.

³⁵⁷ “Lashed tight by His hand; Imposed upon my neck.” Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*. (Lam 1:14)

³⁵⁸ “He sent a fire/Down into my bones.” *Ibid.* (Lam 1:14)

³⁵⁹ Daughter Zion represents the other God(s) with whom the Israelites were whoring.

³⁶⁰ God abuses female characters through stripping and public embarrassment. Magdalene, “A Study of the Language of Divine Sexual Abuse.”

³⁶¹ Floyd discusses how the female personification of cities could be interpreted in different roles related to God, including wife and daughter. Michael H. Floyd, “Welcome Back, Daughter of Zion!” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2008): 484-504.

³⁶² “The Lord has trodden/Fair Maiden Judah./For these things do I weep.” Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*. (Lam 1:15-16)

Get your fucking hands off of me or I Judah, get up. Stop shaking your head, come on,
come on, *Mom*
I don't care what Mom says, we're leaving
Get the fuck off of me—*Mom!*
Don't you dare touch me, don't you fucking

We've ruined her, haven't we?⁵⁶³
Defiling her stories for entertainment and
God-forsaken lessons on "morality"
These stories exhaust me; they make me sad
And I know what you're thinking: I'm not even supposed to be here.
I'm the midrash mansplained by rabbis who contradict their own writing
I am writing myself out.
I am writing myself out of the narrative they forced me into
because I do not like the shape of its leather-bound spine,
or the contorted positions they put me in,
stretching me out until I'm so thin I'm see-through
In their world, I'm an unwomanly woman, the truth essence of absence
for their definition of the word does not include what I am;
So I must explain what I am not:
I am not expendable.
I am not unintelligible
I am not a dandelion, nor a demon
I am not cattle for feeding or fucking or breeding,
I am not an animal born for slaughter.
I am not a body for Adam's taking and remaking
I am not a mother just because you want me to be a mother.
I am not a woman by your definition—
Because I have a body. I have a mind. I have a future.
& I have a name.
I am a Woman.
I am Lilith.

⁵⁶³ "And cry: 'We've ruined her!'" *Ibid.* (Lam 2:16)

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