



jonathan han

五十年

QUINQUENNIAL

joseph on the shore

a rest on the flight into Egypt

Without the threat of obligation, of course,
I was the one who brought my son to the sandspit.
Seven years old, he now looks more like his mother
than anyone else. Where the shore hooked the water,

my son stared at the unmoving—as though
immovable—flotilla of fishing boats.
Then he raised his arms, much like how I told
him Moses had done so before us.

I laughed at the sight, and he laughed at what
he knew was larger than imitation. But first
I squared his shoulders, handed my staff,
and lifted his arms a touch higher for better effect.

And so, the fishermen threw out their nets
and steered each boat clear from one another—
a small miracle for the books, although rarely
spoken of by those who plainly say,

My Child, My Son.

where i keep my brother

When I buried Abel by the river
in a shallow grave, his toes stuck
out into the water, wrinkling — or writhing —
as though still alive. No less a bone-bed,
a place of rest by the Pishon
that floods in the turbulence of spring.

But I lie: it was a false spring,
winter soon stemming the root of the river.
What began, now ends in the Turkish mountains; the Pishon
withered between its withering banks. Following
the rest of what's nigh, it left a dry bed,
the sheet of mud soiled and wrinkled,

a far cry from the white, writhing
fury that follows witness, that bared a grieving Spring.
But I will not have his bones,
not even now, during this arid hour. The river,
being dead, can keep the dead. Last night I struck
my brother, and dragged him feet-bound to the Pishon,

not knowing where the Pishon
was, not having killed a brother before. Myself writhing
with this thought — *if Love be Love, if Love was also mine* — stuck
in my throat, my mind, knowing his offspring

can hear my silence, like the river
ebbing, returning to a source, a bed

where sanctity is restored. The same bed
in which as children we recalled the names: *the Pishon,*
the Tigris, the Gihon, the Euphrates, and traced each river
to the center, to each other, whispering:
Eden. Eden. Eden. The Spring
that our father spoke of, while mother stuck

to silence. I was stunned
by how much heavier he'd grown, bigger boned,
since I last held him. Winter
plays the trick of conclusion; the Pishon
did not bear the truth, and carried the wilting
brother not to sea, but a desert.

Spring has marked, if not struck
my heart. The river: his bed:
the Pishon. I bury him — writhing.

Bethlehem

after Luke

In the same country, the shepherds kept watch
Over the flock resting in the valley,
Washing their feet in the hidden ponors.

The young man fiddled with his father's lute,
A wandering note led a lamb to stir
And then pace away. But then an angel

Appeared with all of God's glory glaring
Over the grounds, stunning the drowsy sheep
As they clambered out of the blind valley,
Slipping on the marl. So the angel said:
"Do not be afraid, I bring—" but the son
Dove into the water and the father
Threw rocks, aiming for the wings, which beat back
As the angel moved on to the next field.

how to preserve the heart of a sparrow

When once asked, *if night is outside,*
What's in? I said nothing, but then recalled
An inner lapse of light, the lingering and gnawing
That interrupts the walk to work
Or stuns me from sleep.
Fiddling with a spool of regret,
I strain a thread of memory
Until what was once singular
Unravels into fibres of recollection:
What did I say? how? or when? I pick at
Conditions of a past no longer conditional.
So now, when asked, *if night is outside—*
I ask, *where? where, outside?*

shave

At fourteen, with enough hair to have a reason
to do so, my father held both the razor

and my hand in his, feigning strokes
close to my chin, my cheeks, my throat.

A rite of passage performed in the bathroom,
the mirror could barely fit us both,

despite our supposedly similar faces—
a reflection displaced by age.

gethsemane

The rank of white pine, unwavering
despite the lopsided flight of birds,
once shot through from rain and now
with light, encircled the empty lot

as though unwilling to give way
to unreasonable desolation.

The bough is a faint copper
when bare, when shaken out of prophecy,
when it reaches the field of vision.

A forest only needs five trees,

and now my eyes have seen past each
from afar: the saline soil,
the gates that hang awap,
the gauze of my window.

two sparrows in the subway station

True birds,
true just

for the sake
of their name.

One busts through
a fastened box:

polystyrene,
fraying chopsticks,

and scattered rice.

The second bird perched

straight and stiff on the
rim of the trashcan,

claws gripping the steel,
wings tucked in its coat,

another accomplice
to this city scavenge.

Spotting a passerby,
it jumps the gun, breaking

into flight, the plumage
sucked in as it swings

towards an apex.
The first bird, aware

of its partner's flight,
abandons his loot.

The pigeon-hearted
Bonnie and Clyde,

But I'm sure we'll
Find the bodies.

True things always
have their proofs:

stray feathers,
bloodied beak,

fractured
ceiling.

thoughts on a quiet evening

after Li Po

My one eye blurs the moon.
I rummage a way out of bed

And pulley the blinds
So to hear it click and let it drop

Evenly. But through the slats
The light comes through,

The shadows between not unlike
The paths scraped out of the snow.

child

I am the first born, the only
child of an otherwise barren
generation. Such was the state
of my mother's uterus. Must

I concede that more could be
lost? But all lines have to end
with one or another form
of starvation. But must I

concede? From the dirty
hand to the parched mouth,
we live somewhat losing
the girlish notion of

consanguinity.

As sharing, after
all (of what's now left)
is caring merely

for the other,
like a savage
armed, I carry
a rattle full

of blackened
rice, taunting
the next child
or any

other
human
figure
who has

two
hands,
one
mouth.



about the author

Jonathan Han was born in Germantown, Tennessee, and raised in Hong Kong. He is now based in Boston. As an editor, he has overseen issues of *Clarion* and *The Beacon*, and as a writer, he has contributed to publications including *New England Review of Books* and *Essays in Criticism*. Follow him on Twitter @jonhan_theman.



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