

Mt. Moriah or Why God Won't Talk to Women

for Sarah Jewel Cross

*To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in
childbearing; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children."*

—GENESIS 3.16

In "Bible Stories for Children" Mt. Moriah looked like this:

Lush green hills, a little like the Ozarks
a few boulders scattered for effect
an altar built of sticks and stones
blue sky, dawn light, and Abraham sprawled across poor Isaac
rope-wound hands and feet
a look of total disbelief staring up
at his old man, this old man
who doted on him day and night
then led him lamblike to be slaughtered.
Abraham's face, little more than sculpted stone
itself, dead serious.
God had talked to him, had said,
"Sacrifice the boy.
Sacrifice your child.
Sacrifice the seed of Israel.
Sacrifice your only son,
your son."
And so he would.
Knife raised high above his head
blade glinting in the sun's first rays
an angel gorgeous as a gay boy right behind him
reaching to prevent the descent
of dagger into breastbone.
Nearby in the bushes

a ram caught by the horns—
scapegoat to be sliced and diced and roasted for God's pleasure.

When I asked my reverend father what he would have done
he would not lie.

Was it then I began to doubt God's sincerity

His love for me?

Or later when I thought of Sarah all alone

waiting for her menfolk to come home?

What would Abraham have said?

"God told me to. I did."

Bet that would have gone over big.

God won't talk to women.

Ever notice that?

He knows mothers, daughters, sisters

they be talking back,

"Say WHAT? You want me to do WHAT?"

After all I been through with this boy—

birthing him at ninety (or nineteen)

feeding him my tit

dressing him, undressing him

bathing his body

combing his hair

patching his wounds

tasting his tears.

Now You say You want him BACK?

Give me one good reason, God . . .

no, faith is not enough.

Jump back, Jehovah!

You've lost your mind

'cause you ain't taking mine."

Close the book.
Turn the page;
story from a different age—
Mt. Moriah of my childhood.

Walk with the woman I've become
down a two-lane blacktop in Deep Country, Arkansas
not far from Texas, close by Louisiana;
buttercups and daffodils bowing down in fields
where the heat hangs heavy as a stage curtain.
Turn left into a gravel lot where underneath a spreading oak
lean planks and broken benches and every Wednesday's
dinner-on-the-grounds and a good old-fashioned gospel sing.
Follow the limbs of that ancient oak until you see
green fingers scratch their leaves against the steeple
of an old white clapboard church, one room
no frills, no scroll, no stained glass windows,
no denomination to distinguish it from all the others
you've seen scattered along the highway.
Come on around back. There above the fence
in wrought iron letters bent and twisted
stained with rust, read "Mt. Moriah" above the gate.
Go ahead, open it, it's never locked.
Weave your way through countless graves and artificial flowers.
Beside a youngish elm near the fence that keeps the field at bay
she lies between her husband and her son.
Another Sarah, surrounded by her sacrifices
sole matriarch of the Camden Crosses,
ten which she bore proudly into the land of the living.
Two died young, two sons
they're buried here somewhere,
snatched without a word from God

without a single explanation, no discussion
not one breathless, whispered why.

Sarah bore eight more into a world at war
with little enough to eat, she fed them
clothed them, cured them from the measles.
She thought she was safe, having given it all
and her children grown and ready for work and the world
and the next war.

She was relieved, believing her sacrifices were complete
for she was old, well past her child-bearing years
when they came for her rebel son.

City cops bound his hands, beat his head,
locked him in an icy cell. No call from God
or from Camden's finest came
when that noxious halo slid
down past the damp brown curls
across the violet eyes. Hushed,
the knotting of the boxer's biceps
his final, choking cry.

God won't talk to women.

He sends messengers that say, "Hey, guess what?

Good news! You'll have a boy today."

What he doesn't say is how they'll die

at the hands of other men, in uniform or out.

There's a thousand causes, all good reasons
to cut a youngster down.

Any woman worth her salt will tell you, "Life
will kill you quick enough. No matter how strong,

No matter how tough.

There's no duty to go early.

Why drive back into darkness what we have brought to light?"

But God won't talk to women.

It broke her, Lanny's death;
bowed her down towards the ground
where she couldn't look up any longer into God's inscrutable face.
We laid Sarah beside her son, wrapped closely
in a blanket of Arkansas dust, red as the dying day.
As friends and family bowed to pray
I turned my face away in silent sacrilege
and returned her to the Mother.

Now is it any wonder that women have grown tired
of being constantly ignored?
Wanting to restore a feminine face to God,
they bestow her with breasts to feed her children
arms that embrace, hands that heal
and will not wield the knife.
Beneath a full moon,
in a circle,
around a morning coffee table—
when God's a woman She will talk
and God knows we need Someone
we can talk to.