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## **Jacob**

### **monologue, Part I**

**by Ralph Milton**

*This is a script for a one-person acting out of the story of Jacob as a sermon. ( See performance/presentation notes at the end of this monologue.) Of course, it can be read simply as a story.*

You may ask, why am I walking like a wounded camel?

I will tell you. I am Jacob, but my real name is Israel. And that is why I walk like a gimpy goose.

So, what does the name Israel have to do with my limping leg? It's a good question. I'm glad you asked.

My mother. You should have known my mother. My sainted mother Rebecca. She was quite a woman. Quite a woman. May she rest in peace. If it hadn't been for her, I'd still be walking on two legs. My mother and the Fear.

You may ask, what do I mean by the Fear. My grandfather Abraham and grandmother Sarah called it their Shield. Some call it God.

I have no name for the destiny that drives our lives, for the voice that comes with angels and dreams, for the one who promises children, as many as the stars in the sky or the pebbles on the ground.

I call it the Fear, because I fear the power that it has – the power it gives me. I meet the other people of this land who have their many household gods – a god for rain and a god for fertility – a god for healing and a god for wealth – rooms full of gods for this and that. But we have no such little gods, we have the Fear who gives us promises and guides our lives. It is enough. It is enough.

My mother was no mouse. When Grandfather Abraham sent a servant to find a wife for my father, the servant went off to visit some distant relatives and he prayed to the Fear... "Help me know which woman to bring back to Isaac to be his wife. When I reach the well in their village, I will ask young women to give me a drink. Let it be the young woman who not only gives me a drink but offers to water my camels as well."

How was my poor sainted mother Rebecca to know that all those camels belonged to this one man? She was a good, hospitable girl, and she thought only two of those camels belonged to the man when she offered to water them. Do you know how much water a camel can drink? Down into the well she went, my poor mother, down all those steps with her water jug, and each camel drank ten jugs of water. The man had 10 camels. You work it out. I have no head for figures.

“You should know your place.” That’s what my father Isaac used to say to mama. “You should know your place and be obedient like other women.”

Ha! Rebecca, my mother would laugh at my father. “Your daddy knew you needed a good strong woman to make something out of you.” That’s what mama used to say. “So why did he send ten camels? For two camels he could have found a nice mousy woman, but to water ten camels you need legs and a heart and a stubborn mind.”

“A stubborn mind you have,” my papa would say. My father’s name was Isaac, which means “laughter” but he hardly ever laughed. My mother made up for it.

“Yes, I’m stubborn as a deaf donkey,” my mother would laugh. “And the better you are for it!”

Long into the night they would argue. It’s a wonder they stopped arguing long enough to conceive me and Esau.

Do you know Esau? How would you know Esau? If you ever met Esau you’d not soon forget him. He is big and tall and hairy and red. Muscles? Let me tell you he has muscles. Brains, no, but muscles he’s got. We were twins. He got the muscles, I got the brains. It’s no wonder we never got along.

Even before we were born we were fighting. Mama told us the story, over and over. “You and Esau you fought in my belly. Even before you were born, you made my life miserable. Miserable, you made my life. Why should a woman have such trouble? I ask you, why? Ah!” Then she would laugh.

Esau was born first, and they tell me I was hanging onto his heel. So that’s what they called me, Jacob, which means the Heel. Now I ask you, what kind of a name is that to give a child. The Heel. The cheater. The one who cheats other people.

So it’s true. I hate it but it’s was a good name. Well, you see, I had to live by my wits because I was a tall, skinny kid with no muscles. Esau was good at hunting. He could catch anything, but I stayed home with mama in the tent. I stayed home and mama taught me how to scheme and talk to people, how to make them do what you want them to do.

I was mama’s favourite all right. “You should be head of this family when your daddy dies.” Mama said that. Over and over she said it and I got to believe it.

That’s how I got Esau one day. Esau and me – we didn’t get along. I had to pretend to be nice to him because he could flatten me with one punch, and he did a couple of times. Pow.

I hated him but I never let him know it. I couldn’t hit him back

No, that’s not how I got this limp. It was the Fear who gave me the limp. I learned how to stay out of Esau’s way well enough, except when I wanted something out of him.

Poor stupid kid. He had so many muscles and so few smarts. He came home from hunting one day, hungry as a bear because he hadn’t caught anything. I had a bowl of red beans mama had cooked for me. Good stuff. Beans with mutton fat and garlic. Smelled

wonderful and I could tell Esau was ready to just grab it from me and smash me in the teeth if I objected.

“Esau, I want you to have some of this red stuff. It’s really good. Mmmmm. I just made it and it is delicious. No there’s no trick. No trick at all. I know you are big and strong and you could just take it, but I know you don’t like doing that, so I’m giving it to you, Esau. Just like that. If you want to give me something for it in return, you can, just to make it fair, but you don’t have to. You’re strong enough to just take it, but I know you have a sense of fairness, Esau, so you can offer me something.

No, I don’t want your bow or your hunting knife, I have no use for them. How about your birthright Esau? When papa dies, oh maybe fifty years from now, I’ll be the head of the family. That’s all it means, Esau. You could still hunt, and I’d take care of the sheep and the goats because you don’t like to do that anyway, and we could run the family as partners. I’d just look after the administration Esau, which you don’t like to do anyway, so it makes sense. Is it a deal brother? Good show. I’m sure you’ve done the right thing, brother. Shake on it. And here’s the beans. Bon Appetite.”

Before you ask, no, I was not proud of myself for doing that. You will understand I was working from necessity, not choice. I had no choice. Can you imagine being ruled by a big, hairy goat like Esau? Mother agreed. It was a necessary thing to do. Unpleasant but necessary. It was. What would you have done, eh? Eh?

Diddling my brother was easy. Papa would not be such a pushover.

But he was getting old and he was almost blind and mama and I started talking about how we might work that part of it.

Well, no, that’s not true. mama started thinking and sometimes she would talk to me about it. I was afraid. Scared spitless I was.

“Mama! The Fear will punish us for our deception. It is wrong, wrong, to steal the inheritance from Esau. It is the law of our people that the first born inherits double and becomes the father of the household. And what if Papa finds out? What about that Mama? What if I go in for Papa’s blessing and he curses me instead? You keep telling me you’ll take the curse on your head, mama, but how can you do that? I’ll come out of it with nothing, no home, no family, not even the Fear to protect me.

Mama wouldn’t listen. A woman who can carry water up a well for ten camels is not someone who’s easily persuaded. She kept her ears and eyes open, looking for the right moment, and it came one day.

She came running out to me as I came from the village, running and yelling and telling me to hurry home. “Right now.”

Papa had told Esau to go and kill some game, to cook it, and bring it to him, so he could pronounce the blessing.

“Hurry Jacob, she said. “Hurry...I will cook a goat, you go put on Esau’s clothes so you smell right. And you can go in and get the blessing from papa before Esau gets back from the hills with his game.” Mama handed me some sheepskin to put on my arms and neck so I would be covered with hair, the way Esau was. It all happened so fast, I didn’t have time to get scared.

“Papa, I’ve prepared the game for you, just the way you like it, with salt and spices. I’ll put it in your hands papa. Well, yes, it was quick. I caught it almost at the edge

of the encampment. Maybe the Fear provided it, the way the Fear provided a ram for sacrifice when Grandfather Abraham was about to sacrifice you.

“My voice...well, I have a bad cold you see. My voice just sounds funny.

“Yes, a kiss papa, just as you say...thank you papa.”

*(Jacob kneels in silence, as the blessing is pronounced.)*

*“May God, the great Fear, give you the dew of heaven  
and the fatness of the earth,  
and plenty of grain and wine.  
Let many people serve you.  
Be Lord over your brothers  
and may your mother’s sons bow down to you.”*

“Thank you papa. Thank you.”

“Mama...he blest me. He didn’t curse me. I have the blessing. I have the blessing of the Fear mama. I am the one who will carry the blessing. I have the blessing because I cheated Esau.

Can the blessing be on the head of one who cheats his brother? Oh mama, what have I done? Mama, I may have the blessing of my father Isaac, but have I brought the curse of the great Fear on my own head?”

Mama wasn’t so much afraid of the Fear. It was Esau she was afraid of.

“So now, my son Jacob,” she said. She wasn’t laughing this time. “You have the blessing of your father Isaac. Now here is your knapsack and your staff, go right now to my brother Laban. Go, right now. Esau will want to kill you when he finds out. Go now. And while you are there, find yourself a wife. Laban has daughters. Go.”

So I went. With my walking stick and my blessing and nothing else. I walked and I ran and I wondered if Esau was following me. All the bread and water mama gave me in my pack was gone the first day. By the end of the second day, I was desperately tired and hungry and thirsty and I wasn’t even sure I was on the right path to my uncle Laban’s house. When the sun began to set that morning, I wasn’t sure there would be another day for me.

“So this is what it’s like having the blessing....”

“Great Fear...I have been stupid. Forgive me. There must be some way I can give the blessing back so it can go to Esau. It belongs to him. I cheated him. I don’t deserve the blessing and I shouldn’t have it. Please take it back. Please take it back. I am so tired.”

*(JACOB FALLS ASLEEP. A VOICE IS HEARD.)*

*“I am the Fear, the Lord,  
the God of Abraham and Sarah,  
I am the God of Isaac and Rebecca.  
Know that I am with you,  
and will keep you wherever you go.  
I will not leave you  
till I have done what I have promised.  
I am with you.”*

*(JACOB WAKES UP CONFUSED.)*

A ladder....no not a ladder...a ramp with steps leading up...up, all the way up...and beings of light, angels maybe, up and down the ladder. And the Fear, the God of my ancestors who blessed them and me, this God standing there beside me...with the promise. Again the promise. Again the promise to me, the liar and the cheat. I have lied to my father...I am running away from my brother whom I have cheated, I have nothing, not even my pride, and a bogus blessing from my father, and the Fear, the great God comes to me, to ME, with a promise, with a promise to walk with me into the future.

God was in this place. Surely God was in this place, and I didn't know it. God was right here in this dreary, ordinary place. I should mark this place somehow – the stone, the stone I used for a pillow – I'll set it up on end and pour some oil on it. (POURS) Surely God was in this place. I will call it, Beth-El, the house of God, and from now on, I will give one tenth of everything I have to God.

*(JACOB BEGINS TO LEAVE, THEN TURNS BACK)*

Which is half the story of how I got this limp. But only half. I will come back and tell the other half. *(SPEAKING MOSTLY TO HIMSELF)* Can you imagine... God making promises to a guy like me in a place like this?

CONTINUED IN JACOB MONOLOGUE II

***Performance/presentation notes***

*I am convinced Tom Driver of Union Theological Seminary in New York is right when he says, “the church and the theater are children of the same womb.”*

*That is why, one summer, when the remarkable Jacob saga occurred in the Revised Common Lectionary in bits and pieces over four Sundays, I resolved to tell the whole story in its entirety, though it took me two Sundays to do it.*

*People need to hear the story! It is one of the foundation stories of our faith. It is one of the basic stories on which the whole concept of a “chosen people” rests. And it is a powerful story of how God empowers the unworthy and the unprepared.*

*I did the story as a one-person show. It was a lot of work. I acted out the story of Jacob using the chancel of the church as the stage. There were no props. No scenery. No false beard. No makeup. Just me as Jacob. I did put on an appropriate robe and carried a staff.*

*No, I didn't memorize the whole script. I read the biblical account over and over, then I read every commentary I could find on Jacob, and then I wrote the two scripts you find here. I carved myself a staff out of a pine branch, found a very simple costume, and then made sure I had the story line very thoroughly in my head.*

*The Russian Mennonite culture in which I grew up is very close to the Russian Jewish culture, and the dialect I spoke as a child is similar to Yiddish. So it was not difficult for me to bring out the Jewishness of Jacob in a style somewhat reminiscent of Tevya in “Fiddler on the Roof.”*

*Such an ethnic interpretation should only be attempted if you can do it well and easily. Nothing offends as much as a badly done caricature.*

*If you can't do it really well, don't do it at all. Simply play Jacob in whatever way feels most comfortable to you. Several clergy friends have told me they read this story to kick-start a Bible study group.*

*It could be simply read as a story from the pulpit. But please read it over, out loud, several times, before you use it this way. Reading it as a story means you need to work even harder to milk meaning out of the script.*

*Drama and storytelling in the church should be done simply, and done well.*

*Most importantly, enjoy what you are doing. If you don't enjoy yourself, no one else will.*

*R.M.*

*PS. There's a similar script for a one-person show based on the story of Noah.*

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,  
all of them available through Wood Lake Publishing.**

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