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Jacob a monologue, Part II by Ralph Milton

*Part II of a script for a one-person acting out of the story of Jacob as a sermon.
See performance/presentation notes at the end of Part I*

So you're back. Haven't had enough of the ramblings of an old man?

Or is it the limp? You want to know how I got this limp, eh?

I told you. It was my mother, Rebecca, and the Fear. I know. I know. I didn't really tell you. So, I'm telling you.

But where did I leave off? First thing that goes when you get older is your memory.

No, that's the not the first thing, but we won't discuss that. Memory is the second thing which is good because then you forget about the first thing you lost.

I had a dream, you recall. Right here, in this place. Beings of light, going up and down this ramp up to heaven. And God, the great Fear was right here. With me. In this place, eh.

Can you imagine that? Me, Jacob.

My name tells you I'm a liar and a cheat. I cheated my brother out of his birthright – I lied to my poor blind father. I was running away in fear of my life and lying here on my face in this place. And the great God, the great Fear should have come and just turned me into flea on a camels rump.

But, no, the Fear made me a promise! The promise of a future. The promise of a presence.

Now I ask you, what kind of a God is that, eh? Sometimes I wonder if this God of ours, this Fear, really knows how to manage things. You'd think God would know who to speak to. And where? Eh? Other people have small gods you can bribe, small gods you can flatter and they'll do nice things, for rich and powerful people at least.

But the Fear, the Fear is the only God we have, so I guess we have to make do.

Yes. The story. You people keep leading me off track with all your questions.

I was running. I was running away from my brother Esau, whom I had cheated. Running to try and find my uncle Laban who lived in Haran, and I had no idea where I was going. I had this dream... Did I tell you about the dream? Yes I did. This first thing that goes is the memory. I think I said that already.

I find Haran. How? I have no idea. I do not know, because I stumbled around and finally came to a well and asked the shepherds gathered there where they came from. Haran, they said. Haran? Do you know my Uncle Laban. Do we know him, here comes his daughter Rachael.

Rachael. You will understand. I was young. And who can explain what young people do when they fall in love, eh? I can't explain it myself. But I can remember it as if it was yesterday, Rachael, those dark and sparkling eyes,

her skin was dark and beautiful,

like the tents of Kedar,

like the soft curtains that surround a throne,

was the dark, dark skin my love, my Rachel, Oui!

What do you say when you are smitten, eh? What does a boy say when suddenly, right out of nowhere, the most beautiful woman in the world comes to him and he falls arse over teakettle in love? Well, I said, "Can I water your sheep?"

The other shepherds explained that they had to wait until all the shepherds were gathered, then they could move that big heavy stone off the top of the well.

No problem, I said, and I went and I moved it. I moved that stone. All by myself.

It was Esau that got all the muscles in my family, but here is skinny Jacob lifting that stone by himself. He thinks he has muscles! Muscles for brains, he has. For weeks my back hurt but I told nobody. Nobody. Young men have their pride, y'know.

You ask, is that how I got this gimpy leg? No, out of that I got a gimpy back, but my leg was fine. I got a gimpy brain too, I went over and I kissed Rachel, and started crying, slobbering all over the poor girl.

She doesn't know me from a hole in the ground. She ran off as soon as she could, and how would I blame her? She thought maybe I was too long in the desert and she would be maybe right. I ask you. would you trust someone who has dreams in the desert and then moves huge rocks for a pretty face?

But I was in love. How else can it be explained? Before I knew it I was dickering with her daddy. Laban, my uncle.

"Uncle Laban, 20 years labor for the hand of your daughter? Really...no ten is too much too. I was thinking maybe five. Five years would be right for such a plain woman. You will no doubt have a hard time finding a husband for such a one. Well, all right, she does have her good points, but ten years? No, eight years is too much as well. I am young, Uncle Laban, but I am no fool. Five years is all I will give you in labor. All right. Seven. You have a deal."

You may have surmised, when it comes to bargaining, my Uncle Laban was no slouch. My Uncle Laban was good at many things – scheming, planning, getting the best of other people. In short, my Uncle Laban did all the things that I was good at and I hated him.

But I had to work for him for seven years, and all those years I kept my gaze on the beautiful eyes and the deep, dark skin of my love, my Rachel. Seven years passed. It felt like seven days. Seven minutes, even.

At the end of seven years, I don't think Rachel even liked me very well. But her sister, Leah, now that was another story. Leah was Rachel's older sister, and you might say that in the looks department, Leah was – well, let just say that she was ah...different. Her eyes. She had strange eyes. Weird eyes.

I liked Leah. She liked me. Liking was where it ended. Leah was a good type. Smart. Witty. We had lots of good conversations. You could talk with Leah about things a man shouldn't discuss with a woman – politics, religion – how to survive in the desert. But as for those juices that stir in a young man's body, I wanted Rachael. I loved Rachel. Leah and I were friends, that's all.

So seven years later. I have earned the bride price. I go to Laban and I say, "Time is up, Laban, time for me to take my bride. Let's have a wedding."

Laban knows how to throw a party. Let me tell you we had a wedding feast. Food, and wine, and dancing and singing and everything.

That's for the men. The women sit over to one side, with their veils down over their faces. It is not proper for women to drink wine or dance. They can watch us men.

On my wedding night I was flying high. By the time the party started to wind down and I decided it was time to go into my bride, I was six sheets to the wind.

"C'mon, my darling, its beddy bye time....."

The next morning, it was Leah. It was Leah! I had spent the night with Leah, which meant that Leah and I were married. Not Rachael. Leah!

"Leah? Why did you do this? Leah why? Laban? Because you are the oldest?"

"Laban!!! You no good cheater. Swindler. You are lower than the ticks on a sheep's belly. May the fleas from a thousand camels infest your armpits. What is this with Leah! I paid for Rachael. That's what I worked seven years for. Seven years Laban! Yes, I know Leah is the oldest. Yes, I know she should, technically be married first, but you are not likely to find a husband for her Laban.

Oh I get it. You can't find a husband for her, and you don't want her on your hands all your life, so you sneak her in and get me to spend the night with her, and I'm still not married to Rachael. So I suppose you want me to work another seven years for my second bride? Is that the game, Laban?

Laban!!! You are the south end of a camel facing north. I don't mind working for you, but I do mind not being married to Rachel. Seven years, but I get to marry her right now. Alright, at the end of the week. Sheeesh!"

You may ask, how did Leah and Rachel feel about all this? It is possible they did not enjoy me and Laban bargaining about their future. Well, I'll tell you. I don't know. Men do not concern themselves with such things. Women have feelings. Men are logical. That's why men are men and women are women, and why men are in charge of the world.

But I will not soon forget Leah's eyes, when we woke up together that morning. Leah's poor, sad, weak eyes, and the pain and the power I saw there. Who can explain such things? Who?

But that is idle chatter. I had work to do and a living to make, and in not too many years I had sheep and goats and camels and babies. Most of my babies came through Leah. Some came through the maids.

Rachael was barren, poor thing. She tried and tried, but no babies until finally, years later, she gave birth to Joseph. Ah, my wonderful Joseph. I don't have favorites of course, but he was easily the most intelligent and beautiful of all my children.

Things were well. Well. Except for Laban. More and more difficult that man got. We kept trying to swindle each other, Laban and I. Sometimes he won, sometimes I won.

But cheating your father-in-law is not the way to build a good relationship, so I decided it was time to go home. Actually, it was the Fear who spoke to me and told me to go home.

Leah and Rachel and I, we talked about it, and they wanted to go.

Yes, I know, one should not discuss such things with women but....

Well, it was me who decided. After the Fear spoke to me.

We ran, actually. We waited until one day Uncle Laban was off shearing sheep, and we left. He came after us, as we knew he would, and there was a bit of a scene, but what could he do. My mind was made up. I was going home.

Home to Esau. My brother. You remember Esau, the big, muscular hairy one? Eh? Esau whom I had cheated out of his birthright, out of his inheritance. Esau who said he would kill me?

You may ask, if my brother wants to kill me, why do I want to see him. I'll tell you. I don't know. The Fear spoke to me. My heart spoke to me.

Leah and Rachel spoke to me, "Jacob, this thing needs to be faced. You cannot find peace till you are reconciled to your brother." Leah, she said it, "Jacob, deep down you love you brother."

Ah! Emotions are for women!

But we went. My wives, my children, my servants, my sheep, my goats, my camels. When we had them all together, I realized, Jacob, you are a wealthy man. You are a rich man, Jacob, a rich man.

Yes, I was a wealthy man. But I did not know my wealth until that night. That night. And yes, my friends, we are getting to the limp. You will finally, after all this time find out about the limp.

"Leah, Rachael, take the children and the servants and the flocks across the Jabbok. Right over there is a nice shallow ford. I need some time to think. I need some quiet time to think over my strategy about how to handle my brother Esau. He wants to kill me, you know. Yes, you know that already. But I need to think about that, so you go ahead, and I'll spend the night here and meet you on the other side in the morning. And Leah, Rachel, children....I..I...just go."

(JACOB LIES DOWN TO SLEEP AND STRUGGLES AS IF IN A DREAM)

Let go. Let go. I'll give you a fight for your money. Who are you, anyway? Who? Let go of me. Yes, my name is Jacob. Jaacoob! Yes, the cheat. Jacob the cheater. Jacob!!!

Israel? Is-ra-el? I cannot wrestle with God, I am just a man. Just a man. Just a man.

(JACOB SCREAMS AND WAKES HIMSELF UP.)

It was just a dream of course. Think nothing of it. Just another nightmare. (HE TRIES TO STAND UP AND SCREAMS IN PAIN) Do dreams cause such pain? The man in the dream called me, Israel. “You will no longer be called Jacob, the cheater. You will be called Israel, the one who struggles with God.”

I remember it. Every moment. How can a mere human struggle with God, with a God who offers promises and pain?

This is the Fear who offered me hope, hope for the future, the hope that was promised to my grandparents and my parents is now given to me along with a new name. Israel. Why the pain?

There. Now you know. Now you know why I am called Israel, which means “one who wrestles with God,” and why I walk like a constipated camel. The Fear did it to me. My mother Rebecca helped it happen. So did Rachel and Leah for that matter. So did my father Isaac and my brother Esau and my uncle Laban, they helped it happen even though they didn’t know it.

I walk with a limp now. I walk in pain, every step, and I have given much thought to that pain. Why does God offer hope and hurt together? Why does God lead us down such painful paths?

I’ll tell you. I don’t know.

But I do know that after I crossed the Jabbok that morning, as I walked beside Leah and Rachel, we talked of deeper things and I think there was a love that grew beyond the bedroom. Love yes. And respect too, respect and understanding of the pain that comes with life. I thought differently about my brother Esau too. I stopped wondering how to escape his anger, and hoped instead that we might heal the wound that kept us from each other.

These are new things. These are good things. These are painful things.

(To God) Great Fear, I do not know why we must suffer pain as we struggle to be your people, Israel. I do know that it shudders through our very bones with every step we take toward the hope you promise, as you lead us through the wilderness of life.

I do not know why, but I do know that it is good. So lead on, Great Fear. Lead us, your people, limping toward your future.

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

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