Jessica Jacobs
Covenant Between the Pieces

What woman here is so enamored of her own oppression that she cannot see her heelprint upon another woman’s face?

—Audre Lorde

Abram divided
three cows, three goats, three rams down the middle

and walked with God
between the halves
like a bloody Red Sea.

To cut a deal, cut animals. Those were literal times.

*

Say it wasn’t just animals.

On one side, Sarah, his wife,
on the other, Hagar, her handmaid, his second wife.

Between them,
a man and jealousy
passing like a flaming torch.
And ahead, for each, a son;
their boys, half-brothers:

Ishmael, whom “God will hear,”
twice-exiled at Sarah’s command.

Isaac, whose name, “he laughs,”
seemed more like a taunt with every passing year.

*

Each woman the other’s shadow self:

Sarah, a beloved princess, as Hagar, a daughter of Pharaoh, had been
in Egypt. Hagar, the fertile body Sarah had always wanted to be.

*

Together,
two singular people:

Sarah the only woman renamed by God; Hagar,
the only woman to give God a name: El Roi, “God Who Sees Me.”

Together, two wings
are enough to unshackle from the grasping ground. Alone, one wing
is just a lonely hand waving for help in the distance.

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Because it’s easiest to loathe those most like us,
women often reserve their worst cruelty for each other.

But like neighboring countries, their boundaries
are just agreed-upon fiction.
For both Sarah and Hagar, a famine in not just the land but their lives, especially with women: no friends, no confidantes, just their husband talking to the empty air he said was God.

And God came in many flavors—bound to Abram was *El Shaddai*, a title slippery as that channel through the animals:

> “God Almighty” and also “The Great Breast,”

each dependent on the other: nurture without action, milk spilled across a table;

power without care, a sturdy jug with nothing in it.

*

Enough then of God and men making deals among the carnage.

Let the pieces form their own covenant, making whole what others tore asunder.

Let them be for each other like Eve was with Adam: *ezer kenegdo*—

> *ezer,* “helper;”

> *kenegdo* “compatible with” and also “opposite.”

No meek helpmeet but an oppositional helpmate,

strong where you are weak, fit
to take in your flaws. *Partner* in Hebrew shares the same root as *zygote*, a cell built from the essence of two people, the start of a thing intended to live beyond those who created it:

*a zug*

—a kind of mirror with that selvage of selves between you.

* In the desert where Sarah had banished her, Hagar ran between two peaks, up and down across land empty for all but her dying son.

Up close: a woman, terrified, desperate, searching for help.

From afar: with her tracks crisscrossing the sand,

from the Seeing God’s-eye view, Hagar was a needle mending a great tear.

Back and forth, back and forth, a surgeon suturing a consolable wound.