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.

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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.

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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.

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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 kenegdoezer, "helper;" kenegdo

"compatible with" "opposite." and also 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

813

 every mate a kind of mirror with that selvage of selves between you.

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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.