

Exodus

1) Yea, and the names of the children of Israel are mentioned. Yea, and the randy little devils were filled with fruitfulness, and Pharaoh noticed this.

And he said, YOiks! There are a lot of them, yea, they breedeth like rabbits and might join with our enemies and be naughty unto us.

Therefore let us enslave whilest the enslaving is good, and let them build cities for us, treasure cities (Hmm—I hear pyramids...) Pithom and Raamses shalt these cities be.

But the naughtier they were unto the children of Israel, the greater was their fruitful ness, and the Egyptians were sore miffed.

And Pharaoh told the Hebrew midwives, told he him them, only daughters must thou let live, off the boys, what say I you doeth, coz I'm the boss, me! me! me!

But the midwives grokked God, so they didn't.

So the king was verily peeved, and said, hey, what giveth. And the midwives spake, saying, Well, you know how Hebrew women are, livelier than Egyptians, and generally the brats popped out before we get there. And Pharaoh was not smart, and bought it.

And the Hebrews kept at it, and lo! there were more of them! And God thought the midwives were cool, and made them houses.

And Pharaoh said unto his people, saying, keepeth thou the daughters and toss the boys into the river.

2) And a man of the house of Levi wed a daughter-o-Levi, and she bare a brat, and it was a goodly brat, and she hid it three months.

Then made she an ark out of bulrushes, or as some would have it, plastic, and inserted the babe within it, and put it in the river by the flags.

His sister watcheth.

Then came the daughter of Pharaoh to

wash in the river, and to splash, and to sport, and to swim, and make bubbles with her nose, and to drown small animals, and to see the ark, and to send her maid to get it.

And she saw the child, and it wept, and she grokked it was an Hebrew.

And his sister said, shall I call an Hebrew nurse? And Pharaoh's daughter said, yup, and the sister brought the child's mother, who not only got to raise her own child, but yea, also got paid for it.

And the child grew, which was considered normal, and Pharaoh's daughter called him Moses, because she drew him out of the water.

And Moses was grown, and went out to his brethren, and saw an Egyptian smite an Hebrew. And Moses looketh to the right, yea and to the left also, and he saw no-one, so he offed the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.

Next day, behold, Moses saw two Hebrews scrapping, and said he unto them, give over. And one said, ooo! Watch it or he'll do us like he did the Egyptian, And Moses thought, thinking, Ekk! The gigs up!

And Pharaoh would have Moses dead, but Moses went on the lam, and fled to Midian, where there was a well.

So anyway, Midian's priest had seven daughters who wanted to water sheep, but shepherds drove them away, But Moses helped them water the sheep, for yea, he was a nice guy.

When Reuel the priest heard this, he bade his daughters call Moses, and Moses ate bread, and did dwell with Reuel the chartered accountant, and married his daughter Zipporah.

And she bare a son, and Moses called him Gersham, after a really neat book he had read about a man from Mars, but his mother called him Fred.

And Pharaoh died, and the Hebrews groaned because they were in bondage, and God heard, and God remembered the covenant, and looked upon the children of Israel and had respect for them.

—Michael McGrath

Wasps

The last of the children leave the park to head homewards. A pale-haired girl with serious blue eyes remains, sitting in a sandbox under the icy rising moon. Finally, the chilled air begins to seep in and she gets up and goes home. The lights are off, but low sounds of love or hate muffle through her Mother's bedroom door. In her own bed, the girl pulls the blankets around her ears.

Years later, they bought a bigger house. Given second choice of any of the six bedrooms, Robin picked the one in the basement. It was quieter there. And in the property behind the house, she was permitted to keep a horse. In the summer she spent as much time as possible outside, usually riding. They lived in a small town on the West Coast, so summer days were lush and benign. On one such day a change occurred, though she could not say what that change was until many years later, long after her mother had sent Robin to live with her Grandmother.

On that day, Robin decided to practice riding over the three obstacles she'd set up along the back lane. Horse and rider approached the combination at a steady canter, and smoothly jumped the first two, but at the third her horse's ears swung forward, his head snapped up, and he slid to a halt so suddenly she was almost thrown. She kicked him lightly and turned him back to the beginning. Normally he would not make the same mistake twice, but this time he cleared only the first jump before swinging violently to one side and halting abruptly. Robin smacked him with her crop and went at it again — and again, and again, and again. His behaviour was inexplicable. They had an understanding — he would respond to any reasonable request, as would she. Once when she hit him unnecessarily, he bucked just hard enough to express his indignation, and she apologized, and so he continued the circle without fuss. But he wasn't acting indignant now. Nor had he reason to be, so she made him do it again, after a couple of solid whacks. Holding him straight and forcing him on with difficulty, they finally cleared the last jump. Then, instead of slowing down as usual, he sped up. She tried to ride him back past the jumps, but he refused to even walk near them now. Robin made him stand rather than turn away, and it was then that she noticed that there were a number of large flies in the air nearby. Flies that flew in a

strange pattern. Flies that made a low angry sound. Only then did she see the silver grey nest hiding in the foliage by the road. A touch of hand and heel and they were gone.

Sweating, exhausted, her horse seemed more relieved than resentful, but bursting upon Robin was the realization that she'd wronged him. Years of painstakingly built trust, and now this. She felt horrified, but gradually this horror became mingled with awe for her horse's good sense and tolerance. She stripped off his saddle, calling him laddie and rubbing his neck. She walked him for a long time, talking to him to tell him that she was sorry and would never do it again. She let him amble slowly, happy now that it was all over. When he was cool she gave him a drink of water, and put him in his pasture with plenty of sweet alfalfa.

Robin left her horse content, but in here there was still a feeling of revelation and humility. She pulled off her boots and wandered into the kitchen. Her mother was there, scolding one of the cats for something. She then turned away, towards the fridge. Overfilled with emotion, Robin dared to tell her Mother about what had happened. She talked about the wasps, the trust, and her horse's courage. She said how sorry she was, but also how happy. When she finished her Mother said:

"It was stupid, not to have seen those wasps."

It was as if the air was suddenly sucked from the room and replaced by a tidal wave. Robin was breaking, and a part of her was leaving for good. Then her muscles betrayed her. Her mother turned, startled, but it was too late. Robin ran outside and slammed the door, then buried her shame in her hands while her lungs heaved for air as if she were stifling, suffocating. When her Mother followed and tried to pull Robin's hands from her face, she fled to the field. There she sat among the sweetness and listened to her horse's steady munching until nothing mattered anymore. Then she bridled him, and as she opened the gate her stepfather appeared on the balcony and yelled down:

"What's the matter? Come inside!"

"Nothing. I'm going riding," she said, as if to herself.

"Come and talk!"

"I'm going riding!" Robin answered, this time clearly.

—Stephanie Berger



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