

The (Re)turning Son: A Prodigal Not Yet Home

Call me Cain, but I can't believe what I see. My "brother" has come home. There he is, "Abel" himself, celebrating with my father, celebrating with *my* family, eating a fattened calf.

For years, I've worked the soil and managed the fields. I've offered the fruit of my labour to my father. The blisters have long since turned into calluses; the pain in my lower back keeps me up at night; the nights have been short and the days have been long. And where has my brother been? By what name shall I call him?

For years, he's been gone. His nights have, no doubt, been longer than his days. He's taken more than what he's been given and wasted it away. Prostitutes have seen him more than we have; they, at least, know by what name to call him. There must be a mark on his forehead somewhere.

How am I to celebrate his return? How is it possible that he has dared to come back at all? Where was this "brother" of mine when my mother fell ill? Where was he when our sister got engaged? Where was he when she came to term before her wedding day? What kind of role model has he become?

And what of that song? How can they be singing at a time like this, especially that song? "I could sing of your love forever, I could sing of your love . . ." I can't stand that song, especially now. It's . . . it's blasphemous. Every single word causes my body to contort; the words eat away at me. This is punishment, and it is more than I can bear.

To make matters worse, that smell—the smell of fattened calf, of veal—is driving me insane. It teases; it screams of injustice. I haven't had veal since my sister's wedding. That calf should have been laid upon the altar, not upon my brother's palate—the tongue that has done irreparable harm. How is it that my father saw it worthwhile to sacrifice his own fattened calf for a life that wasn't worth saving, that had turned from his ways, that had lived a life of sin and misery. How am I supposed to live in gratitude? How am I supposed to celebrate his deliverance?

There are too many questions and too many of them are unanswered. I, Cain (or is my name Abel); I, Cain, cannot celebrate my brother's return; I cannot accept my father's invitation to what looks like a wedding banquet. I will not accept it for the rest of my days. I will remain bitter, overwhelmed by my own self-righteousness for as long as I live. How I wish it could be different. How I wish I could be in there; how I wish I could belong; how I wish I could celebrate.

But I, Cain (or is my name Abel); I, Cain, am yet angry.