

THE ICE-FIELD OF THE ABSOLUTE ENCOUNTER

David S. Cole
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For Debby,

whose grace and kindness
make so much else possible

THE ICE-FIELD OF THE ABSOLUTE ENCOUNTER

(Scene: A mountain clearing with an ice floor, surrounded by grass and bushes. The backdrop, representing a range of sheer, precipitous ice-mountains, should give the impression of a distance infinitely spacious and infinitely occupied. At a few points on the backdrop, clumps of trees with bright green leaves are represented as growing out of the ice.)

ISAAC enters, stooped under the weight of a pack and two huge bags of fagots. His face shows the strain. After he has taken no more than a couple of steps on to the stage, he looks about him in wonder, throws down the sacks, and turning from the audience, explores the panorama of the ice-mountains. While he is doing so, ABRAHAM enters, stops, looks at ISAAC, shakes his head in pity, and then sits down on one of the sacks. ISAAC whirls round to ~~ABRAHAM~~ ABRAHAM.)

ISAAC

I like it here!

ABRAHAM

Do you? You like the ice-mountains?

ISAAC

That's really what they are - ice-mountains! Not twenty miles from where we have sheep, there are ice-mountains! I can't get over it!

ABRAHAM

There may have been a time I could get this worked up over the scenery.

ISAAC

I kick at the dirt with my sandal and it's like steel. This ice is like steel! And yet - feel that sun! How can the ice not melt?

ABRAHAM

I admit, it's puzzling.

ISAAC

It's not puzzling, it's fantastic! The sun is melting the cheese in my wallet, I can feel it running down my leg; but this ice -

(kicks at the ice with his heel)

look, you can't make a dent, even.

ABRAHAM

It's puzzling to me, Isaac, as it is to you. Beyond that, I don't know what to say.

ISAAC

Is it always like this?

ABRAHAM

I don't live here, Isaac. I'm not a citizen of the ice-mountains .

ISAAC

Oh, you've been here before. You say to mother you're going into the mountains and we don't see you for the next month. You come here.

ABRAHAM

I do, I don't deny anything.

ISAAC

Well, I'm asking you, father, is it always like this: the sun striking upon the ice, the ice like steel.

ABRAHAM

To be honest with you, Isaac, I never noticed before this time.

ISAAC

How could you not notice?

ABRAHAM

(rising impatiently)

How could I not... I didn't! I've had other things to notice, to keep my eye on. I've had my affairs...

ISAAC

I can't get over it and you never noticed it!

(pause)

I'm trying to find out why we're here.

ABRAHAM

(indicating the sacks)

Would you begin getting out the sticks, please.

ISAAC

And that's another thing. What is it with all these sticks?

ABRAHAM

There have to be sticks...

ISAAC

Two bags of the damned things I've dragged up this mountain and across the ice.

ABRAHAM

I have to have kindling.

ISAAC

That doesn't answer anything.

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ABRAHAM

I'll say it again: for what I'm going to do I need kindling.

ISAAC

Well, that's all I'm asking you, father: what are you going to do?

ABRAHAM

But then, I'll need flint, too, and I never thought of that till this moment. Would you look in your pack, please, and see if you happen to have a flint on you.

ISAAC

Now I'm supposed to have flints!

ABRAHAM

Isaac, I'm not saying you're supposed to have flints. Do you hear anybody suggesting anything like that?

ISAAC

Oh, what's all this now - ?

ABRAHAM

All right, Isaac: why are we here? We're here to make sacrifices. We're upon this ice-field to give over something of ourselves to the living God. And I mean the both of us, Isaac, is that clear?

ISAAC

So then, the sticks and the flint -

ABRAHAM

Don't be hasty there, Isaac! There's more than one way of sacrifice, and a number of things to offer. Now will you pile up the sticks, please.

ISAAC

(sgrugs)

I don't see what harm that could do.

(turns to the sacks)

ABRAHAM

(his voice full of anguish)

Isaac!

ISAAC

Yes?

ABRAHAM

(mastering himself)

Will you pile up the sticks, please.

ISAAC

I've already said yes, I will.

(ISAAC takes large handfuls of sticks from one of the sacks, sits with his legs crossed on the ground, and begins to pile the sticks into tangled bunches. As soon as he gets a few handfuls into a pile, the pile collapses.)

ABRAHAM

As you say, I've been here before. I've come at various times in my life with various animals in tow. And sometimes, no animal at all...

(pause)

Do I make myself at all clear, my son?

(an expectant - for ABRAHAM - pause; ISAAC is completely absorbed in his work.)

ISAAC

I don't know what you think you're going to do with all these

sticks and no flint.

ABRAHAM

Sometimes, no animal. Sometimes I would bring God the state of my mind and that would be all I'd bring Him. Here is the place where my Lord and I grow explicit with each other.

(pause)

Do you sense me trying to tell you something, does any of that get through?

(long, and again, for ABRAHAM, expectant pause. ABRAHAM makes as if to speak again, and just at that moment ISAAC happens to speak, inadvertently interrupting him.)

ISAAC

I go on bunching these sticks and piling them up - pointless, thankless work, unless the Lord should do what he once did for you. Wasn't it in Chaldea that he reached down flame to kindle your sacrifice?

(pause)

ABRAHAM

I'm sorry, what did you say?

ISAAC

I'm asking you, wasn't it in Chaldea -

ABRAHAM

Oh, about Chaldea, where the lightning took a hand - yes; but that was in Chaldea, I don't get that kind of service anymore.

ISAAC

You're going to need something like it.

ABRAHAM

You know, Isaac, you really do have no idea of what I'm going to need.

ISAAC

Well, are you going to enlighten me at some point?

ABRAHAM

Enlighten you! - are you serious? It must be for the light you've come to, for very light, that you can't see what a place you're at.

ISAAC

Look, I can't be expected -

ABRAHAM

You're expected to use the eyes in your head, that's all.

"Enlighten me"!

(gesturing at the backdrop)

Trees have their being from ice, and it's not enough for you!

(ISAAC makes as if to speak; ABRAHAM comes in on top of him.)

What's enough then, Isaac?

(pause)

Well, I can't be going on like this...

ISAAC

(with exaggerated politeness making sure that ABRAHAM is finished speaking.)

I can't be expected to puzzle out the trees as they go with the sunshine, as they go with the ice. What is it with all this sunshine and ice? What kind of journeying have I been about that I end in such a place?

ABRAHAM

Everything's here!

ISAAC

Now that - that can't be !

ABRAHAM

It is! It is! This reach of ice, this moment of time - do you really not sense it: the way purposes on every side are crying out to be known purposes, the way you just say what you want and it's here for you.

ISAAC

I can tell you one thing we want and don't have.

ABRAHAM

I defy you to say it.

ISAAC

To say one thing we want and don't have? Now I think of it, I can say two.

ABRAHAM

Yes, well?

ISAAC

Well, one thing is flint -

ABRAHAM

Are you still on the flint?

ISAAC

Isn't it just like you to be minimizing that!

ABRAHAM

I'll get my flame alight, don't you worry about me!

ISAAC

Catch me worrying! Want to hear the other thing?

ABRAHAM

One was flint...

ISAAC

Yes, one was flint; and the other -

ABRAHAM

Wait - stop it!

ISAAC

Why "stop it"?

ABRAHAM

Because it's taken me a while, but I now know what you're going to say.

ISAAC

Is that a reason not to say it?

ABRAHAM

Isaac, you have to stop!

ISAAC

Now? Not for anything in the world!

ABRAHAM

You have to!

(ABRAHAM throws himself at ISAAC, trying to get his hand over ISAAC's mouth. ISAAC intercepts his arm and pins it behind his back.)

ISAAC

Don't be a crazy man and then look to me to be kind; I don't love you well enough.

(ISAAC releases ABRAHAM, who falls to the ground.)

So - is that settled? So - the other thing you need and don't have -

ABRAHAM

Would you just not say it, Isaac?

ISAAC

- need, father, and conspicuously, father, do not have -

ABRAHAM

Isaac, a man's questions may take him straight to despair.

It's your truth to come at, but you have to be more careful ~~at~~ ^{about} coming at it the wrong way.

ISAAC

- Cannot by any stretch of the imagination, father, be said to have, is, the animal.

ABRAHAM

Oh, god.

ISAAC

Where's the animal? All right, it's not bright, but you could forget a flint. But when you come to sacrifice an animal, you don't forget the animal. Do you? Do you forget the animal when you come to sacrifice an animal?

Well, I'm not giving you time to answer; it could be you were planning to trap something up here.

ABRAHAM

Isaac!

ISAAC

I know, it might have been a bad day and in the end no offering; I'm sure you've worked all this out. And that just puzzles me the more.

ABRAHAM

Isaac!

ISAAC

Probably, you know, it's staring me in the face...

ABRAHAM

If you were to look at my face at this moment...

ISAAC

Well, if you're not answering, or if that's all you're answering, thanks just the same, but I think that instead of looking at your face, I'll just look around.

ABRAHAM

(pointing with both hands at his face)

No, here; here! I want you to see the harm your words are doing before you speak any more of them.

ISAAC

Yes, but I'll just look around.

(He begins to mime pushing aside shrubbery and searching.)

I'll make an effort to be informed. I'll see what's been provided, if anything. With me, father, the living God has got to be very, very clear. You could say of me, "He likes to know everybody's mind", and the divine mind's a mind.

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So I'll just start my searching.

ABRAHAM

(as ISAAC searches)

I have an ^wanser[^] for you; if you were to lift your search from the grass to my face, I think you would see your answer there. But that's how it will have to be. I can't just out with it, and I can't ~~even~~ say why not. Nothing about my answer is simple. Whatever you get from me is going to have pain and complexity in it. But you go on poking around there...

ISAAC

And I'm rewarded! If it isn't a ram!

(He mimes unhitching a leading string from a tree and leading the ram out onto the stage.)

It's got to be for us, hasn't it? When you find a ram hitched to a tree in the middle of an ice field, it's got to be for you, hasn't it? Will any man here make a doubt of that?

(raises his eyes to heaven)

Thank you, thank you, that was clear, the way I like you to be.

So I guess I've answered my question.

ABRAHAM

Well, you've found yourself a ram.

ISAAC

What I wonder - and I suppose you won't have anything to say about this, either - is why you didn't say a word. Or did you? Is this what you meant with your "Everything's here"? Couldn't you have been a little more proud and clear when such splendid attention was being paid? God amidst us this way, why will you be so cagey?

(ISAAC reaches out his hand to stroke the ram, mimes feeling vacancy, turns in alarm in the direction of the ram, then rushes to the side of the stage and looks intently off.)

Bolted!

ABRAHAM

(looking in a different direction from ISAAC's)

Here is the descent of the ram for the mind's eye:

Across slants of blue ice the ram slips and dashes, getting what support a ram can. And then? The ram attains the shelf of first leaves, and in his step is wildness. And then? The ram plunges into a darkness of slim pines: it is making one's way across a page which the pen has stroked and stroked. Now a great ravine throws itself in the ram's path: is there no declination? no, none; nothing for it, then, but to try the walls. Over goes the despairing ram, and though hurtling fast, the walls rush up faster. And then? What's next on the way down? It is a stream to splash about in and get breath. Now it's off again: Head down and horns out, the ram is running at the orange ball in the west. Evening finds the ram still running, on across fields of snow, well off the mountain, in silence, into darkness.

So much for the descent and loss of the ram for the mind's eye. Meanwhile something will have become clear.

(pause)

ISAAC

Don't speak it, I understand.

ABRAHAM

You've been looking long enough to understand

(He gets up off the ground.)

So: you have been handed on to the ice-field. Dust your robes,

and welcome. Do you still "like it here"?

(long pause)

ISAAC

(slowly)

You're being terribly sure; but will I let you do it, do you think?

ABRAHAM

But what's this now, Isaac? I thought you said -

ISAAC

Yes, a lot of your thinking has that stamp. You must have so many things you need to get taken for granted...

ABRAHAM

The ram danced in the eye of the mind and you said you understood.

ISAAC

What? That it's me for the sacrifice? That I get; there you've been abundantly clear. Now I have to be careful and clear, fighting for my life, giving my conditions...

ABRAHAM

What is all this, what's this about? The living God -

ISAAC

Just a minute and I'll get to the living God: could we keep things here on our own level for a moment? All right, now, putting everything most simply, Isaac is a muscular young man and Abraham's a gre^ybeard. - no, wait, I can be even simpler: I'm a power, you're a weakness. So I want it ~~to be~~ understood -

ABRAHAM

Nothing in my whole experience could have prepared me for this

discussion!

ISAAC

I wonder if that's really quite true. Anyhow, I want ^{it} ~~to~~ understood that if you don't come through with a reason for killing your son, if you don't, there's really nothing in the world to keep him from hustling you off the side of this mountain.

ABRAHAM

What are reasons here? Over and above that, is this my child speaking to me?

ISAAC

Now, wait: I can see how your thoughts are beginning to run. Either you're thinking "coward" or you're ^{re}thinking "rebel"; but think neither. All I want to do is scatter some mistrust on the air. I need the spectres of violent disobedience here about me. I need them for a presence as we go about our understanding.

ABRAHAM

Oh, there's going to be an understanding? To understand what?

ISAAC

Before I say, have I made it clear -

ABRAHAM

Yes, you've made yourself clear; do I have to listen again to all your nasty little clarities? Would you just let us have this ghastliness you've been saving up?

ISAAC

(smiling to himself)

You know, father, it would be a really amusing thing for me to...

ABRAHAM

(nervous)

What, what's amusing here? What is this?

ISAAC

I hope I'm not going to have to say...

ABRAHAM

(desperate)

Isaac!

ISAAC

Well, very likely I'm not. So let's just put our minds to this understanding. That's going to take enough out of us.

ABRAHAM

I'm ready to be told what it is, Isaac.

ISAAC

Well, I'll tell you what it's not, and maybe that will be some relief to you. It's not a question of how much Abraham is loved by Isaac, but of the demands a man is within his rights to make. That's very important, what I just said; I mean, it isn't as if there's someone in the world to whom I could say, "I'll do it for you, I'll do it for no one else," and you happen not to be that someone. Now, do you understand that? ~~Are~~ ^A are you sure you understand? If so, I'm ready with my condition, which will also be very important to you, because that's the condition you get me on.

ABRAHAM

I'm ready for you, Isaac.

ISAAC

I doubt that, father; but here it is: I have to be convinced you do not do your own will here.

ABRAHAM

Why don't you ask what you really want to ask?

ISAAC

I'm asking you, father, what I really want to ask you.

ABRAHAM

Which is only another way of saying -

ISAAC

Never mind what else it is! Mind what you've been asked, and mind what you've been threatened with, and then see if you can't see your way to something honest. Do you do your own will here?

ABRAHAM

You have to see, this is a very hard thing...

ISAAC

No, I'm afraid I don't see that. If you know your own mind -

ABRAHAM

Oh, Isaac, when have I ever made a claim to know my own mind? Can you ever recall -

ISAAC

All right, but you have now got to make such a claim!

(flaring up)

I'm blue in the face hearing you take this, that position!

What I want, I want to hear the positions laid claim to. Do you

do your own will here?

ABRAHAM

You're putting such accusation into that!

ISAAC

So what? Do you do your own will here?

ABRAHAM

You're making it harder and harder...

ISAAC

Do you do -

ABRAHAM

(on a desperate impulse)

All right, yes, then, yes every way: my will, my schemes, my passionate ends in view. What are you, anyway? A boy. A boy filling up my life, growing into the youth I've lost. Fathers of families follow you into the hunt; a woman finds your image in her mind; leaders in Israel begin to give you respect. Now these are my rights, you boy - mine, the Patriarch's! Who heard me say a word about a diminution; and yet, I grow less, grow less, - what's to do? I want to have to kill this boy: give me reason and a means! But you don't even give me that. I've got my father-rights, yes, but in the case of a perfect son...? The snare will have to be the perfection, and some of the fiddling is going to have to involve the living God. The poor living God is going to have to be represented as saying: "I want him for mine; you bring him over here"; and to the father saying: "If you want to show you're worthy to keep him, you're going to have to kiss him

good-bye. I'm sorry, but that's the way I operate, I'm such a joker." What I was going to put upon great God! And you, with all your nobility, would you have stood a chance, or even seen what was happening? Yes, I do my own will here. Throw me off the mountain, if you want. Come on, you power; here's your weakness.

(pause)

ISAAC

It's such an obvious lie.

ABRAHAM

The answer to such a question is going to be a lie. "Do I do my own will here" ! Son, there was no point where Heaven's will took up and your father's left off.

ISAAC

That could be the most arrogant thing a human being has said yet.

ABRAHAM

Well, it could be and it isn't. Would you just trust me, Isaac?

ISAAC

Look, you're going to kill me, do you ask for trust on the basis of that?

ABRAHAM

Oh, I'll do some explaining -

ISAAC

Thanks, Abraham, but I've a sickening hunch what you might consider an explanation worth dying for. So I'll just see what the living God has to say and then we'll see.

ABRAHAM

You think you're going to get the hand reaching down fire each time?

ISAAC

Watch it! Watch it, father! You're asking for the thing you can't bear.

ABRAHAM

Well, you may get ^{your} ~~some~~ lightning, but I will not be the one to single out the living God for you. Understand right off, Isaac, that ~~that~~ is the one thing I will not do. I will not stand aside and refer you to God. I had that lie ready because I saw you coming.

ISAAC

"Coming...?"

ABRAHAM

Coming after the living God.

ISAAC

Well, all right, then, coming after the living God. Who are you to throw yourself in the path? Stop mincing around there, get out from between us. How much jumping around do you think it takes to fill the field of my vision? Whatever you think, it's an understatement, not that I'm so capacious, but I'm watching divine light and it's an eyeful already, believe ~~me~~ me. There may be some jerkety little shadow tripping around in there, but so what? Who do you think's paying any attention?

ABRAHAM

Is that the impression I give?

ISAAC

You want to know precisely the impression you give? A very small man studying how to veil a very sizable ghastliness. I'm telling you what I get: some monstrousness drifting out of the divine will, and you taking the most elaborate pains to keep me from noticing - maybe to keep your own self from noticing.

ABRAHAM

I put nothing upon God!

ISAAÆ

Do you not? When you say, "Please don't jump to conclusions," when you say, "Please make an effort to understand" - Well, the nerve of you! As if you understood a grain better than I what the divine justice is about here! And not understanding, really, really not understanding at all that the dear Lord should be so suddenly dreadful, what do you do - cry out against the light for more light? Better so - much! But you have fought down your consciousness of a rotten place in the divine mind. The way the situation presents itself to you is, you're going to have to do some fast cowering. In the spareness of your faith, you have the nerve to be responsible. But who needs you to be responsible?

ABRAHAM

You want to fix a tricky irreverence upon me, Isaac, but I have not sinned that way.

ISAAC

You can make yourself sound sure...

ABRAHAM

Perfectly, Isaac; perfectly sure. To have sinned that way, I

would have to be capable of a thing I'm not. I have wandered over the ice-field of the divine mind too long to try and abstract the divinè will from my own. I have not the apparatus to take such a quintessence.

ISAAÇ

Answer this clearly: Have you any confidence in the justice of what you're being asked for?

ABRAHAM

I don't need to answer that because here I am with a knife in my hand; but I have confidence in the admixture of divine will in whatever my convictions are.

ISAAC

So much for trying to get something straight out of you.

ABRAHAM

Oh, Isaac, you were answered as directly as I have ever seen a man answered!

ISAAC

You claim to have done that for me?

ABRAHAM

I, Isaac? The ram! As he hurls himself from your arms into the waste, the ram is the very directness of the answer.

ISAAC

You can turn that a hundred ways, but you're not about to acknowledge one more thing than the consenting soul acknowledges. If most of my attention weren't taken up wondering how a knife wound feels, I could admire that.

ABRAHAM

Isaac, what's wrong with you that you won't believe the least evil of me, but you're ready to put upon God the worst monstrosities? Now I want to give you your due: you see sanctity, you see monstrosity, but why won't you put each where it's more likely to go?

ISAAC

You - are you honestly as ready as you say to do that? Let's get the living God out here in the open.

ABRAHAM

Well, now, Isaac -

ISAAC

No, let's get him out. I want to run over this, not your way, not mine, but His own way, with His own justice.

ABRAHAM

Maybe that can be done, Isaac, but not by me. Because I see a question and I don't see any answer forthcoming: "What do you want with your knowledge?" I defy ^{you} to be at all specific. There is such a thing as knowledge which, if a man has no need for, he has no right to.

ISAAC

It's going to help me with my death - that's not use enough?

ABRAHAM

Deaths glimmering with meaning are fine things, but no sacrifice. If you want to make a sacrifice, it will have to be your dissatisfaction, that precisely. If you're thinking it over as the knife falls,

that's most acceptable. You've been patient about coming out and asking how I can set a creature's feelings above a father's. Well, it's because...

(pause)

ISAAC

Slip your mind, father?

ABRAHAM

(with a strange, low intensity)

It's because, I'm so busy puzzling away...

ISAAC

Yes, well, it's going to take some puzzling to find the God of Abraham a way out.

ABRAHAM

Once and for all, stop it, stop trying to tear apart this graft of my will upon the divine! It begins to take, and the organism to have life. You may say, unnatural life, unsteady life, if that's what you want to call it. You may say for that matter, Isaac, what you please.

(pause)

ISAAC

(wearily)

Have you got anything at all for me?

ABRAHAM

I can tell you a circumstance while I sharpen the knife.

ISAAC

I think I'll take that, and it's not much considering what else

I'm to take from you, I'm to take my death from you.

ABRAHAM

(Takes out his knife, tests its edge, uses it to gesture with during the subsequent speeches)

What I'm going to tell you is a dream of my sleep. I'm not going to come out and say, "The dream weighs for so much," no, but I'll say this: this morning is the morning after that dream.

A fury of water streamed over the dreaming mind. Where's it all going to? and Where's the fire? were questions by which a dreamer might struggle on to some dry place in the consciousness. Shadows, for an answer, formed themselves around light places, the mind shook the image clear, and I could make out it was these mountains going under: great peaks, mind you, submitting to drowning as if their attention lay elsewhere. The range was becoming a series of profound ocean ridges, the trees became underwater plants, the animals became fishes.

ISAAC

What has this got to do with anything?

ABRAHAM

Wait, Isaac; you have to be more patient than that. All right: now by degrees the waters cool off and calm themselves. They can afford to be glassy now, they've got themselves everything, they've submerged a whole mountain world to their will. Or nearly. Because this icefield of ours has not gone below; no, this one shelf of ice, sticking out of miles of untroubled water, prevails.

ISAAC

Well, that's like nothing I ever heard.

ABRAHAM

Now I think you'll be particularly interested to know that this ice plays host to a live thing. A furry animal with a wound streaming from its back, an animal who would not consent to fishhood and now hasn't many other prospects, darts all over the ice, frantic for a way off.

ISAAC

Suppose you put a meaning on that.

ABRAHAM

I'm not ready - you mean, on the darting?

ISAAC

Yes.

ABRAHAM

Yes, that's what I thought you meant - I'm not ready. But here's a strange thing, now get this: - I did mention I was dreaming, didn't I? well, I mention it now - but get this: Swirls of fire wind out from the sun. It becomes a raging fireball, and other suns rise in the southern and western skies, fireballs too. All these suns, suns perhaps to the number of ten, travel across heaven to a point in the sky square above the icefield. There the fireball-suns arrange themselves and lock themselves into a ring and pour down their intensity upon the icefield. It's getting smaller before your eyes, each moment a little less ice above water. A moment comes when even the animal, amid his exhaustive dartings, takes a long look up and gets the idea: his place and world is being melted out from under him! He flings himself about the lessening ice faster than the eye has any wish to see, and then

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suddenly, stops dead, stares wildly at the overhead conspiracy of suns, at the sea washing over less and less ice, and then - flings himself upon the water and swims for the horizon.

ISAAC

That was the thing to do.

ABRAHAM

Wasn't it though! I have never seen, sleeping or waking, such a sense of the moment.

ISAAC

So if you had to put into words what you get from this --

ABRAHAM

Well, of course, I mulled and mulled, but listen, here's an interesting part. The fireballs go on with their consuming until there's nothing to see except the twisted little waves that come from something just under the surface. And that much accomplished, the fireballs disband, God knows where they go - in the blink of an eye they're not there. The true sun's back where he was and not saying a word. At a vast distance, I still make out the wounded animal swimming for the horizon, while thousands of feet below, mountain forests sway under water, and rabbits and birds practise with their new fins.

(pause)

Maybe you're waiting for me to add, there were words coming in under the visual sensations.

ISAAC

That's what I was waiting for. What did you make the words out to be?

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ABRAHAM

I should say, under the circumstances, what could those words have been but the speaking of God?

(pause)

ISAAC

(after waiting a moment in vain for him to continue)

I have a right to what was said, whatever was said.

ABRAHAM

Did I mention the clear chords of music? The willow leaves? The smell of fresh bread?

ISAAC

What's all that?

ABRAHAM

Well, further details.

ISAAC

You don't have to give me every touch. What you do owe me is, the words. You have to get God's words across to me as clearly as you can.

ABRAHAM

Now wait! I say, "God spoke," but I'm only telling you how it felt to me. As I say, I had the impression of divine speech, but that doesn't mean God spoke, I'm only giving my impression.

ISAAC

"God spoke" is "God spoke". "God spoke" is clear enough.

ABRAHAM

That's really not necessarily so. Did I mention the waterfall

of flowers?

ISSAC

The what?

ABRAHAM

A waterfall, as you might call it, a waterfall of blue flowers sweeping down swifter and swifter before the whole scene.

Some yellow flowers, too, actually...

ISAAC

Look, you go on giving me piece after piece of your vision, and don't you see I haven't a use in the world for them? I have to have God's words from you and that's all I have to have. God said, and you must say.

ABRAHAM

(steadily)

I was having one of my dreams, the way I do, when God spoke through the confusion of my dream. God spoke through at me, exceptionally clear words, I thought, though at the moment I have no sense of the words apart from the confusion.

(difficult pause)

The gist was, to bring my boy under the knife.

ISAAC

With that understanding I lay down my head.

(ISAAC kneels and bows his head. ABRAHAM, by pushing down on his back, forces him, half-resisting, to a prone position. ABRAHAM lifts his knife and at the same moment lifts his robe as a shield between ISAAC and the audience. He plunges the knife into ISAAC's back; ISAAC does not move or cry out. ABRAHAM pulls out the knife and throws it from him as if it burned his hand. He lowers the robe.)

He goes across the stage and takes up some sticks which have fallen out of the sacks onto the ground.)

ABRAHAM

(surprised)

Soaked through!

(He kicks at the ice, tentatively at first, then violently, repeating with each violent kick the word:)

Melting!

(He kicks so hard he loses his balance and falls across ISAAC's body; rests there for a moment, panting.)

Melting. There's a turn.

(He begins to get up, happens to catch sight of ISAAC's head, and starts back horrified. He approaches the body again, lifts the head off the ground and fingers it in different places. He lets it drop back and turns out.)

Where the blade took my son, here is a ram's head, bleeding.

That's it. I don't have a word to say after that.

SLOW CURTAIN