

RIVKA MIRIAM

**Egypt**

Egypt clung to us, always chugging along behind  
like the locked caboose of a train en route,  
or an invisible tail, that rattles the whole body up to the nose,  
and wags behind us in times of fear and joy —  
The old man within, hearing the creaking door, flinched,  
whispered: Egypt's open again.  
Another old woman stood, now and then shouting:  
I'm a handmaiden! And a princess!  
There's a great light! And darkness! And looked at her withered hands.  
An infant crowed. And a lamb cried.  
The curse tapped reminders on the window with a worn fingernail.  
And a large soothing hand placed a blessing on our heads.  
A pillar of fire, or of cloud, silent and submissive, visited upon us.  
Sometimes at midnight, the Egyptians would call from afar  
and we didn't know if they were the cries of swearing, or voices teeming with longing  
but we rhymed their cries like notes into a song,  
and to their measured music continued to move on.

Translated from the Hebrew by Lisa Katz with Orr Scharf and Natasha Sajé.

ADMIEL KOSMAN

**Requests before morning prayers**

*To whispered upon opening one's eyes*

Squander, squander,  
on me, my good Lord,  
one more portion, just  
a tiny one.

Please, my Lord  
one more deep breath.

Squander, squander on me, my Lord,  
blow into my silly  
clay, just one  
breath, one more.  
If you have one left.

A portion. A tiny portion, my Lord,  
just please remove,  
extract now,  
the stain of disgrace.

So please, just one, my Lord,  
a tiny extra portion,  
to sniff, a portion of life,  
my Lord, potent and strong, and mighty,  
glorious, in order to defeat  
their counsel. To condemn  
their wicked devices.

Will you inject, my Lord,  
mine own, into a vein, into  
the pipeline,  
my lungs, diaphragm,  
slowly, slowly, a small portion,

to be added gradually, into  
my soft flesh, nicely designed and aesthetic:  
brawn and virility, a manly tone, a righteous position,  
a cheerful hue, a straight back, a metallic ring,  
right into my windpipe,

inject my Lord, into me, please, into  
all this softness, mute and feminine and sensitive  
and fine, shaking like a rag,  
inject into me, please,

a solid solution of identity, oh oh, inject,  
my good Lord, a pure and Jewish power,

out of your spirit, my Lord, inject, inject  
terror, inject rage, inject,  
straight into my organs,  
into the veins of the soul.

And I will walk, then, my Lord, in the streets  
of the city! Renew our days as of old!  
Standing erect, whole, faultless!  
And in your service, my rock, my savior, my God-the-stone,  
I'll be the Jew who reveals uprightness  
to the uncircumcised.

Translated from the Hebrew by Lisa Katz