

Exodus in Our Time

*A Story for the Children, Especially for Those
Who Will Begin Their Journeys Soon*

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YOU KNOW, DON'T YOU, that the Exodus story is about you, you sitting around this table.
Tonight, especially, it is your story: Daniel, Rebecca, and Loree,
And soon it will be yours, Joanna, Matthew, Brian, and Julie;
It once was our story, mine and Michael's, Sandy's and Gail's, Ronna's, Freddi's and Scott's,
Robert's and Cheryl's;
And before us, it was Leona's and Eugene's, and Effie's and Harold's;
And it was a true story for those who came before them, too.

But tonight, it is your story
And we will map the ways in which you are the Hebrews.

Do you remember how the Hebrews came to be in Egypt?
They came because there was food, life in abundance, there for the taking.
It was there that they could thrive, and grow into a people.

You, too, arrived nursing eagerly at the land,
Growing strong on the abundance, there for your taking,
Growing into people.

Eager Josephs you were, who paved the way,
Becoming rulers in your new homelands!
Ready to test and then to welcome your kin,
When they would chance to arrive.

For a long time, 400 years the story says,
The Hebrews and the Egyptians lived together.
We do not hear a word about them for this long time.
We assume, therefore, that all was well:
The Hebrews were not slaves; the Egyptians not oppressors.
Together, they thrived.

So it was in our homes.
For timeless years: uninterrupted living.
Continual genesis.

And then, without knowing exactly when it happened,
The Hebrews feel enslaved.
Yes, a new Pharaoh arose who knew not Joseph.
How could it have been otherwise?
For Pharaohs,
Like Josephs,
Change with time.
And the Hebrews are instructed by God that it is time to leave.



Sarah in Pharaoh's court. 19th Century lithograph.

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They are ready, and they are not ready:
Moses equivocates, but knows that he will be ready.

And you? Yes, this happened to you, too.
There was a moment in time that you probably cannot even remember,
When you, too, felt that you were no longer recognizable to us,
That we did not know you any more.
And though we remember Joseph
Oh, how we remember Joseph!
It is not enough

For it is you who needed to set aside your Josephness
In order to receive the mark that time would put upon you,
In order to respond to the silent call, as irresistible as God,
The magnetic pull that tugs insistently at your body and your soul
And tells you to prepare to depart — the time is near,
And you are ready and not ready, but, like Moses, becoming ready.

What have the Hebrews been doing when we hear of them again?

They have been making bricks.
They have been learning how to build,
To know what is the stuff that protective shelter is made from,
To know how to build a home.

ALL OF A SUDDEN

THEY KNOW HOW TO MAKE BRICKS
WELL ENOUGH. THEY DO NOT NEED TO BE
TAUGHT THIS ANYMORE.

And why, all of a sudden, do they feel themselves slaves,
when they had not begun that way?
Because all of a sudden they know how to make bricks well enough;
They do not need to be taught this any more.
And so the practice, in the narrowed walls of Egypt, stifles.

And you?

Yes you have also been learning about what is the stuff that makes a home
And though you could use a tad more practice with the toilet seat thing,
or the dirty underwear on the floor thing,
Still, you are nearing readiness for your apprenticeship to end.
You are nearing readiness to leave Egypt,
The land that has begun to feel too close, enslaving.
Yes?

What of the plagues? What of them?

The land of Egypt can barely imagine itself without its Hebrews.
The Hebrews' presence has enriched Egypt in untold ways.
The Pharaohs love to tell stories about the old days,
When the Hebrews first arrived,

When the Egyptians and Hebrews lived a synchronous life.

But these are no longer the same Hebrews.
They do not want to hear these stories — not because they do not love them —
because they do.

They love hearing of former times,
Of the golden years,
When they were afforded places in the palace.
But they know that these stories could lure them from their mission, their purpose,
Which is to leave.

And they cannot risk being deterred.
They know that they must "lose the earth [they] know for greater knowing; . . .
"Lose the life [they] have for greater life . . .
"Leave the friends [they've] loved for greater loving;
"To find a land more kind than home, more large than earth . . ." (Thomas Wolfe)



And you? So it is with you.

You will rain petty plagues upon us to help us know that the time is right.

We, like Pharaoh, will loosen our hold, as we have been doing little by little since the beginning,

But we will, no doubt, have you make just a few more bricks, to make sure you really know how.

You will throw plagues our way to distract us from the real issue at hand:

That you are leaving.

And we will watch to see how you weather your own plagues.

And we will know, when you find your Goshen, your safe harbors from your own storms, that it is all right for us,
finally, to let go.

And we will.

We will let our people go.

And you will go.

But we will, because we must, follow you to the edge of the Sea of Reeds.

And there we will remember, because it was only a breath ago

When we stood at the shores

And dared to step our feet into a sea much like this one

And how we thrilled as the way parted for us.

We will remember that we wandered for a time

And then we found our way to our Promised Land

This same place that once you knew as Eden

And only now is known as Egypt

But will forever, for us, be our Place of Promise.

We will remember all this

Because this was our story, too

Oh so long ago

And not so very long ago.

We will watch you for a long, long time, as you cross to the other side.

We will be more wise than Pharaoh: we will know that where you go we cannot follow,

And so we will watch

Until we no longer have even our vision to bind you to us.

We will watch

Until all that binds us are the invisible threads of memory's treasure trove

That will always be filled with the awe, as great as creation itself, that we both felt

When once we taught, and once you learned

How to make the bricks

That you would someday use to build your life.

We will still watch

Bound by a gigantic and ephemeral hopefulness about the life that you will build.

We will forever watch

Because of something bigger than memory and bigger than hope

Because of that thing that was the first thing.

And we will whisper a prayer that you will not hear

A prayer for the wandering and the discovering and the creating that lies ahead for you

As you leave Egypt and begin your desert journey.

Whatever words we use,

We will mean something like this:

We hope that you come to know the desert as the place where creation begins, a place of utter quiet, ready to echo
the strains of music that you will play;

We hope that the oases you find will fill you with such wonder that you forget you are in the desert;

We hope that you feel, at each new tent site along the way, that surely this must be the Promised Land.

We hope that you find yourself, one day, in your Promised Land, and not quite be able to remember a time when you
were not always there. 

YOU WILL THROW PLAGUES

OUR WAY TO DISTRACT US

FROM THE REAL ISSUE:

THAT YOU ARE LEAVING.
