

Drawn from Water

Jochebed

A woven basket strung tight.
The stems of the papyrus plant
pressed in balance.

My skirt hanging at my ankles, clings to my skin
as I wade knee high in cool
swamp that pools through the wiping
reeds.

My aching hands
pull the basket in with me
to the fast course of rippling waves.
And it almost rips from my fingers.

Mariam hands him over, and I press
my baby boy close
to my chest. I feel his tears,
his screams,
against my breast.
So loud the world might wish to shush, to silence, to drown.

And as I tear
him away from me,
I've left my gaping chest.

I wrap him rigid
and rest him in the basket
placing the lid overtop his squirming body.

At last, I let go.
The basket scrapes against my body as he
brushes by.
Away.

My knees give out
in silence beneath the waves
as water take him
away, away, away.

Bithiah

I bathe
beneath the sun
in the River Nile.

I see something in the long, yellow reeds,
pressed thickly sunward,
I see, a basket woven with a meticulous hand,
and, curious,
I have the slave girl fetch it,
pull it near.

I lift the lid
to a child --
a Hebrew child that cries
tears to his cheeks,
stuck like honey.

Honey that embalms the dead.
This was a dead baby
if I wouldn't take pity,
keep safe,
raise as a descendant of Pharaoh.

A girl inches her way to me
shivering in the sunlight
"Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"
I thought for a moment
with my face looking to the child.
"Yes, go."

The girl picked up her skirt to run.
But I stopped her,
"What's your name?"
"It's Mariam."