

Joseph, my Hero

by Britta R. Kollberg

The only thing I know about you is:
You took the baby and fled to Egypt,
you took the baby and his mother—

You loved his mother beyond what others
considered adultery. You lined a manger
with straw, and with your shirt, I assume;

you kept the ox off the crib and
the donkey (like the one your son would
ride to his Father's house later)

so the baby could breathe and his mother
receive the incense and the shepherds'
devotion. To this day, they bow before her.

She was meek and obedient. You knew why
you stayed with her. You knew probably
why far away sages traveled the desert

to see your son. You wrapped him
into your humility; you took the baby
and his mother and fled to Egypt;

like your namesake, your uncle, you
found a refuge there for your family.
Unlike him, they returned as if without you.

The Call

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Come children, I've baked my sweetest, most colorful gingerbread. Come.
Everyone passes by here, asks for directions
and I do know. I show them the way, left and right, and onward,
and nobody stays. Come children.
I've seen the crumbs you saved from your daily bread to mark the way;
there was no honey or at least butter on them; so come, I'll feed you
with all I can cook and bake with a sugar crust and fry in rich oil.
The birds which mock me every morning
and—still bored by my loneliness—with sleepy voices at night,
today for once worked for me. Greedily
did they pick up the crumbs that weren't food enough for you nor real traces
of home;
merrily did they lure you deeper into the forest. And here I am.
I've waited for you. I love you already,
so much I could eat you all up.

Of course, there should be a lesson in this: home is
where you go through hunger together;
and the temptation of sugar does you no good.
But who needs a home without the dark smell of caramel,
bitter-sweet almonds smiling from gingerbread men.
I've put up plenty of them on my walls. Come children,
for the desolate woman will have more children now
than the one who lives with her husband.
I'll love you and feed you and no one will ever get lost in the forest again,
not even me whose cake crumbs the birds didn't care to eat.

Come children. The birds meant to ask you what is so good
in a home that has no bread nor love enough to hold you tight when
hunger sets in. A home that sends you away on a refugee trail—
come children, what is so bad about having a sweet life, about working
for food, about eating up all the gingerbread tiles
from my walls until my hut crumbles and we step out in the open,
the forest growing over the place with moss, and dry leaves,
and some petrified bread crumbs, forgotten grit from a former life.

time

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around a dry well
circles of traces waiting
to be filled with feet