

Elisheva's Lament

Michael Rotenberg-Schwartz

Puff more lies and obscure what happened.
They were drunk. They were arrogant.
They walked behind the elders whispering
for death. They walked before the king Moses
and dared stir the stinking raw meat
with pan fires and sweet incense. I know the secret
recipe: two parts stacte, onycha, and galbanum,
four of myrrh, and finely ground frankincense.
Served twice daily, but flour offerings of the poor
expiate sin, and a good name is better than good oil.
I am the mother of joy turned grief. In one day
I laughed five times, knowing Moses a king,
my brother a prince, a husband a high priest,
my sons deputies, and a grandchild the promise
of severe justice. But Justice mixed its laughter
with mine, and the king Moses silenced grief.
Where are your tears Aaron? Hidden
behind the Ephod stones on your chest?
Are you too incensed? I drink my tears,
drink abundantly for my beloved
so my anger may seethe, pillars of smoke
rising from charred meat. The tabernacle completed,
rituals performed with exactitude and fear,
nothing happened. And it came to pass
my sons, kindled with enthusiasm,

spread fire so smoke would cluster, cover
the ark built to manifest heavenly sparks.
Cannot ardor add to faith? Impatience
must be tempered by obedience,
and I am the mother of sufferance.



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