

Three poems

Jan Kemp

Egyptian Lover

Her Egyptian lover
swathed in bedclothes
lies still as a sarcophagus.

She lies beside her Pharaoh
a queen, holding ankh and crook
in her still, crossed hands.

The curtain lifts, the sail of their felucca.
Together they glide
onto the Nile of night.

He sleeps. She watches teeming stars
pour onto their bed from an enormous jug.
Her breasts still tingle.

This is the season of the apricots
- *bukra fi el mishmish* -
slipped in between the lines
that say we live we die.

His skin and hers
have the flush of apricots kissing
when they roll back to back.

He'll rise, somnambulant, go to pee
take camel draughts of water from a bottle
in the fridge, Rameses walking the silence.

Muffled up again, he looks like
Rodin's *Balzac* lying down
monumental, manly, human, gentle.

Bread Making bread in the kitchen
we taste each other's funny shapes
your sausage roll, my almond cake.

But our round oven loaves
rise and puff as if baked on sunbricks
all the hot day after we'd crossed

early to the market village for vegetables
when the light, the river, the people
going about their business make you

believe, if nothing else. Coming back
we'd drink from the middle of the Nile
where the water's pure and oddly sweet.

We'd be in our oldest clothes, the freshly
pulled vegetables like babies in our laps.
We'd look up at the boat sail, back to the far

bank falling away behind and feel Cairo closing
closer, smell its dust, draw into the bulrushes.
You'd be telling me the story of Moses.



Gold Ring Did this gold ring I wear
come from Cairo with my father
to mother's finger, binding
her troth after the war

forty-two years, until rheumatic
knuckles stopped the wearing
& he went to the Egypt of hereafter
swaddled in the love of children, wife.

Again he plays piano within cooe
of the Pyramids, an ear attuned
to the golden oldies, an eye winking
into the surveyor's periscope

in the Western desert. Forever
smiling, Rommel forgotten, he lies
asleep after Xmas dinner '42
in a tent. The sepia photos I found

in his trunk, locking my dolls away
in khaki blankets, go browner now.
From these, my first glimpse of Giza
like some Egyptian child's, perhaps

of a New Zealand soldier on leave
whose unborn daughter's
mother's fine, worn wedding ring
he watched him buy in a Maadi market.