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Judah

Patricia E. Gunter

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Judah

Patricia E. Gunter

These bargained years I've been in the fields
 With you, tending, in my distraction, ample yields,
 Though when the wind pressed down the grain,
 There was nothing, or when the sheep would flurry
 And part as if a man were walking through,
 Joseph, it was never you.
 Golden, plaited stalks crowded down
 And rose again in gusts,
 Or caravans in their moving dreams of dust
 Diffused into white plains.

Once,
 While in the upward orchard,
 On a terrace with the newer fruits,
 Driving away wiry goats
 Whose wild lips strayed too near the tenderer shoots,
 Over yellow crop and sliding greens,
 The stripes of soil, pale dust, and the woad sky,
 I thought I saw your garment—you bearing it—
 Your breast a goat's blood red, and your eyes
 Turned from me.

I shouted; the land shifted
 In some slight breeze, the goats lifted
 Their nobbed heads.

When we merchants
 Wandered home, with sons trailing behind
 Like snagged threads,
 I watched our father become tethered
 To the land and to Benjamin by his understanding dreads.
 He ever mourned you. Benjamin led

Patricia E. Gunter is an M.A. candidate in English at Brigham Young University. "Judah" comes from a collection of poetry that won first place in BYU's 1981 Mayhew contest. It was published in the Fall 1981 *Inscape*, a Brigham Young University student journal.

Him about, as Rachel's scent was still in his hair
 And on his smooth skin.
 And when Tamar, like a raven, returned
 My signet, my bracelets, my staff
 And my seed to me, and I mused upon the gold,
 Watching it burn in her hand as she thrust it forth,
 A hunger stirred within;
 I longed to see all I had so lost again.

In the year the bladed heat gouged
 From the land its silt-like, golden roe,
 We turned, under thin, waterless clouds, to go
 To Egypt; to the Egyptian, royal
 Over the flameless burning of land from his throne.
 I could not know
 The treasurer of our bread was the grown
 Dreamer we lowered;
 Not from the guttering in his face,
 Not from the longing, as protective lord,
 To view the remains of what bereaved Jacob adored—
 Rachel's prince, younger Benjamin.
 I moved his son when Jacob sent us up
 And watched the old man fearfully die,
 His eyes
 Exhaustive in their lingering looks.
 When I nearly lost to a mad Egyptian,
 The taste of silver gorged my mouth.
 I remembered throwing Joseph in a pit;
 Judah now came rising out of it.
 I could not have borne another hunger, or
 Lead a riderless donkey back to Jacob's door
 And lower both of you once more.

So we are brothers again.
 My bones, once brittle stalks, unbend;
 My eyes, released upon the moon of your face.
 Having moved so deeply against my blood
 I envision why we so anxiously tend
 Our wild vine for redeemers.
 Joseph, who should never frighten me like that again.