

Mary's Dust

- POEMS -

MELINDA MUELLER



WITH MUSIC BY LORI GOLDSTON



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MARY'S DUST

Melinda Mueller, with music by Lori Goldston

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Cover image: *Reclining Dress Impression with Drapery*, life-size sculpture
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In honor of my line of Marys:

My great-grandmother, Margaret.

My grandmother, Marjorie.

My aunt, Marcia.

✧

My mother, Maralyn.

*She taught me to read
and gave me the world.*

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ANNUNCIATION

The air before her congealed
and became the angel, blazing.

Its robes streamed and whirled
in a wind that filled her ears.

Through its transparent form
she could see the brown hills

and stunted trees beyond, magnified
and trembling like flames.

She could not have told
what was said. That story was

conceived years later, by men
who had not been there.

Afterwards the stirred dust
settled round her feet with a faint

ringing, as if it were the dust
of a thousand bells.

Maria Aegyptica

b. 344? – d. 421?

THE LOST GOSPEL OF MARIA AEGYPTICA

::1 *For true holiness is savage, saith the Lord.
It will rend you in its teeth for My sake.*



1:17 I wished to go on the pilgrimage, but only
that I might feed my body's desires in new pastures.

1:18 Therefore, I approached some comely-looking sailors
and asked passage, saying, *I assure you, you will not
find me useless.* And they laughed and took me.



1:28 I wandered the streets of Jerusalem
hunting after the souls of young men,
and willingly they fed themselves into my arms.



1:43 Yet each time I put my foot upon the church
threshold, I was thrown back into the dust
of the courtyard, until I was bruised with shame.



2:14 For seventeen years after I walked into this desert,
lascivious songs prowled about my mind,
and longing after wine, and meat, and men.

2:15 And then they all fell silent.



3:9 I was beautiful. Now I am as you see me, sun-blackened. Withered where once I was full and soft. All the hair of my body matted and gray as ashes, that once glowed like fire.

3:10 Naked and filthy, so that the stench of my prayers may assault the heavens.

3:11 When I pray, my body rises from off the ground, for it is a husk the wind might carry off.

3:12 When I step upon the Jordan, its ripples are cobbles of stone, for I have become a stick of dry wood, that water cannot slake.



4:28 I beg you, come back this day a year from now, and pray with me. It is above forty years since I have seen either beast or man, or any shadow but my own.

4:29 Soon my shadow will desert me. Perhaps then the Lord will relent, and have mercy on the nothing I have made of myself, as an offering to Him.

Mariyah the Copt

b. ? [...] d. ?

MARIYAH THE COPT

In Medina when

[...] a Christian and a
concubine [...] scorned
though he is said [...]

[...] birth,
the last [...] all
his wives and [...]
named him Ibrahim

To [...] bitter
grief [...] infancy [...]
Of her [...] else
is [...]

[...] hyacinth is
how [...]

Endnotes

THE LOST GOSPEL OF MARIA AEGYPTICA

Maria Aegyptica (St. Mary of Egypt) appears in various stories as a desert hermit of approximately the 5th century AD. In the most detailed version, she tells her history to St. Zosimas of Palestine, who encounters her (naked save for her unkempt hair) after she has lived in the desert for forty-seven years. She relates how she left her home at twelve, and lived in Alexandria for seventeen years, acting upon “an insatiable and irresistible lust.”

She joined a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (though for no holy purpose), and when, curious, she attempted to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, she was prevented repeatedly by an unseen force. Led by this event to repent her life, she crossed into the desert beyond the Jordan River, living in utter solitude there until meeting Zosimas, not long before her death. As the two converse, Zosimas observes several miraculous events: the woman levitates while praying, walks on the water to cross the river, and is clairvoyant.

MARIYAH THE COPT

Mariyah the Copt was a concubine of the Prophet Muhammad. Their son Ibrahim died in childhood, as did Muhammad’s other two sons, by his first wife, Khadijah.

WHAT SHE KNEW

Marie Colinet’s birth and death dates are unknown. She was already an experienced midwife when she married surgeon Wilhelm Fabry (Fabricius von Hilden), on 25 July 1587, in Geneva. She continued to gain skill and renown as a surgeon (she was made an honorary citizen of Paris in recognition of her work), and is known to have performed forty successful caesarean sections. She cared for Fabry’s patients when he was absent, and continued to carry out surgeries on her own. In 1624 (as recorded in Fabry’s *Centuriae*), she devised the method of using a magnet to extract a metal fragment from a patient’s eye. She and Fabry had eight children, only one of whom outlived her. Wilhelm Fabry died in 1634; nothing is known of Colinet’s life after that date.