

*On the Red (Reed) Sea: An Inquiry*

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We ask that in the future you refrain from using the Hebrew when the English will suffice. We have determined that by Reed you mean Red, by finish you mean come, by covenant you mean circumcision and by order you mean that ritual meal which is observed on the first evening of the Passover holiday in Israel (on the first and second evenings in all other places). You say you were hired to serve food to guests at a hotel on the Reed Sea. You wore a white dress shirt and a black stretch miniskirt given you by Bathsheba, the woman who ran the laundry, a woman so large she required two chairs to hold her when she sat. You slept on a mattress in a room off a back hallway you shared with a girl with a bruised face; her name was Squirrel. Squirrel worked as a chambermaid. Your job was less permanent, as you were among those hired to handle the hordes that had come for the Passover holiday. You say that on the Sunday before the night of the order, the wife of the hotel's owner gave birth to their first child, a son; on the Monday after the order the baby was submitted to a covenant ceremony in the hotel ballroom. Celebrations followed. You were summoned from the dining hall to pick up a tray from the ballroom and deliver it to a guest room whose number you cannot recall. In the room the hotel owner stood in his socks and brandished a remote control one millimeter from the television, manipulating the screen. He said to place the tray by the window. Your hands had not set the tray down when you were pulled to the bed; you heard the dishes clank as your face pressed the pillows. You say you cried out to him to let you go. You say, he replied: At least let me finish. In the room on the back hallway Squirrel eyed you from her mattress, smoking a cigarette, and said she was in love with the hotel owner. You cashed your pay, took a local bus whose number you cannot recall, and walked across the border into the Sinai desert, where you wandered until we found you. We have already informed you of the terms of your release. When will you tell us a story we have not yet heard?