

Noah (Divine Unity)

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And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them,

That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.

And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

“How much do you want for the cotton?”

The man squinted at me shrewdly. His beard was shaved to a thin line streaking up his cheeks.

“Twenty gold coins.”

The man squinted even harder, studying me deeply.

“Twenty gold coins? Two hundred cartloads of cotton should sell for twice as much. Is there something wrong with it?”

I smiled easily at the man. “My friend, there is nothing wrong. I just don’t think the cotton will sell like it did last season, that is all.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Silk and wool are in fashion this year. If you pay more than twenty for my cotton, I will have swindled you. I cannot live with that.”

“I would say you were only a naïve seventeen-year-old, but you are the richest merchant in four cities. How that is possible, I do not know.”

“Since I came of maturity, I have accounted justice and fairness as the ruling motives of my life. As a result, people trust me, and do business with me solely because of my reputation. Honesty and integrity bring with them blessing and prosperity.”

“That goes against all rules of common sense,” the man replied. He thrust his fist toward me, and I took the gold.

“Come,” I said. “I will escort you to your goods.”

As I bade the old merchant goodbye, I gave him a word of advice. “The prosperity of this world comes and goes. One day we are rich, the next we are levelled with the dust. One day, through the bounty of fortune, we are exalted above the kings, the day after that, we are consigned to the grave, or forced to live a life of misery and squalor. Do not put your hopes in such perishable things, my good sir.”

The man smiled at me. He was missing several front teeth, the evident aftermath of a fight. “Fortune has been kind to me,” he said. “I’d prefer to remain faithful to it.”

He set off at the head of his caravan, a long procession of men and goods in tow. “May fortune remain faithful to you as well,” I said.

The sun was setting as I repaired to the tavern beside my house. It was located in the heart of the city. Many of the city’s notables and leading individuals gathered there, and there were always travelers from out of town. I liked to dwell there in my free hours, observe the people and wonder what the future had in store.

“Back again?” One of the girls working at the tavern. The most beautiful girl in town. Always after

my money.

"Am I ever anywhere else?" I asked.

"When are you going to ask me out?"

"I'm out with you every night."

"You're not out with me. That's what I want, David."

"You just want my money."

The girl fixed me with a stare. Then she smiled.

"You're handsome, David," she said. "You're smart, sexy, and charismatic. And you're rich. I want more than your money."

"And you're not going to get it."

"And why not?"

"Because you don't have what I want."

The girl smiled and leaned over the counter. She stroked my cheek with her fingers.

"You're such a good boy."

"You don't know me."

"Everybody knows you."

I looked at her. "How much did you make this week?"

"Three silver coins."

I took a gold coin out of my pocket and flipped it to her. "You're terribly underpaid. Share it with your friends."

She looked around at the other young waitresses. "Do I have to?" she asked.

I didn't answer, so she put the coin in her pocket. Then she went back to studying me.

"It's a pity, that a boy such as you should be so lonely."

"I'm not lonely. I have you for company."

The girl laughed. "No you don't"

"Will you stop?"

"I haven't even started."

I stood up. "Don't waste it," I said.

I walked over to a couch in the corner of the tavern and sat down. There were only a few regulars in attendance that evening. Four girls, all waitresses, sat down around me.

"Don't you girls have to work?"

"It's slow today," one of the girls said.

They looked at me. "Dana has it," I said.

One of the girls sat in my lap.

"Do you need a mother?" I asked her good-naturedly.

"Or a father."

"You have a father."

"He's not here."

"I'm younger than you are."

"Only by a year."

"And you want me to be your father?"

"You know what I want."

"Why don't you spell it out to me?"

"I already have."

"And I said no."

"That's why I'm asking you again."

"Then ask."

"Will you marry me?"

"No."

"Will you take me out to dinner?"

"No."

"Will you sleep with me?"

"No."

The girls all giggled. It was a game they played every night.

The girl got up and another girl sat in her place. She hung her arms around my neck and kissed me on the cheek. All the girls giggled again.

"This is what I get for being perpetually good-natured," I said.

"Don't you want to know what it feels like?" the girl asked.

"You've already told me what it feels like," I said.

"And don't you want to try it?" "You all do it every night. And tell me, are you satisfied?"

"It depends on the man," the girl replied.

"No it doesn't," I said. "You're never satisfied. That's why you can't get enough of me. You want my satisfaction. You want a better life. You want money, a better man, a new life. You're empty inside and you're seeking fulfillment."

"And do you have it?"

"You either go in the direction of fulfillment or you go away from it. As long as you're going in the right direction, you'll be patient. That's where I am."

"You're too patient."

"And you're not patient enough."

"And when is a better life coming?" the girl asked. She was earnest now.

"If it takes one year or a hundred thousand years, does it really matter? One must live as if that day is already here."

The girl showered my face with kisses and then got onto her feet. The other girls arose as well. The tavern was filling up with regulars that needed to be served.

"David," one of the girls, the youngest and skinniest, asked me as the girls scattered.

"Yes, dear?"

"Don't you ever long for something more?"

I looked at her with eyes full of compassion and understanding. "Every day."

One day a venerable and dignified-looking man came into the tavern as I was speaking with the beautiful waitress, Dana. I observed him as he walked in the door. He was serious and grave, probably in his early thirties, wearing plain clothes, and was looking at the ground as he walked. Two steps into the tavern he stopped, looked around with a direct, piercing glance, and frowned. Then he walked up to the counter where I was sitting with Dana, and asked me if he could order a drink.

"I do not work here, my good sir," I said, amused.

The man studied me for a moment, and then turned to my friend. "Do you work here?" he asked.

"Drinks are one bronze coin a cup," Dana said. "Do you want wine?"

"Wine will do," the man said.

He stared at Dana seriously as she poured him a cup of wine. "Whose daughter are you?" he asked.

"Daughter?" Dana asked, surprised. "I am no one's daughter. Why do you want to know?"

The man frowned again. "You're beautiful," he said. "Beauty is given by God to those He favors. It can only be that you are favored by God. So I want to know who your father is."

Dana laughed. I put my hand on the man's shoulder. "We are all favored by God, my friend," I said.

The man continued to study Dana. "Some more than others," he said.

Dana handed him the cup. "I don't think I'm as close to God as you think," she said. "One bronze coin."

"Don't," I said to the man as he reached for his pocket. "I will pay for your drink and for your dinner, if you will promise to tell me who you are, where you are from, why you are here, and why you are talking so seriously about God."

"I will pay for my own drink," the man said. But I flipped Dana a silver coin.

"Get him anything he wants," I said.

For the first time, the man smiled. "My name is Gereshown," he said. "And I see that God has favored you with wealth."

"It is not God's favor that has made me rich," I said, "but rather the workings of fortune. I do not place any value upon it."

"Fortune works only in the hands of God," the man replied.

Dana had moved off to help others. The man's gaze lingered on her as she walked away.

"Watch where your eye lingers," I said to him. "God wouldn't want it captivated by anyone but Him."

"Her shape, her form, her beauty," he said. "It's like nobody I've ever seen."

"Where do you come from," I asked, "and are there not women there?"

"I come from the farmlands to the east, where Seth first went after the expulsion from Eden. There are women there, yes, but they are not quite so exquisite as the ones I find in this city."

"Your eyes are playing tricks on you," I said. "I know these women. Their beauty is deceptive."

"You sound like a man of God," Gereshown said. "How did you win your great fortune?"

I smiled and shook my head. "I am no man of God, my friend," I said. "I am only a merchant who has been blessed with the worthless and perishable things of this world. I lament the fact every day that there isn't any more to it."

"And what more do you want?" Gereshown asked.

"Meaning. Fulfillment. Love. Anything but this."

"You are a strange man," Gereshown said. "You speak as if you are a lover of God and His ways, but you clearly lack Him and have strayed far from His path."

I smiled at the man. Now he was beginning to talk in a manner to my liking. "Then please, pray, do enlighten me," I said.

"Will you take my words to heart?" the man asked.

"I am all ears," I said, "but my heart is hard to find and win."

"God can win any heart," the man said. "No battlement can stand against Him."

"Try me."

"There is nothing more to say."

"You haven't told me about anything."

"I've told you about God."

"What is it that you said?"

"That God is the answer to your problem."

"Is that supposed to move me?"

"God could move a stone."

"Then let him do so."

The man smiled again. "You do not seem sincere," he said.

I stared at him. "And you do not seem a man of God."

"Why is that?"

"You don't know a thing. You are clearly a fool."

The man turned serious. "Let us eat dinner together. And if you invite your fascinating friend to sit with us, I will tell you what you want to know."

"There's nothing fascinating about Dana, and the fact that you think so shows that you have the insight of a stone. Still, I will give you your dinner."

Dana brought us plates of roast lamb, bread, and vegetables, and when I paid the tavernkeeper a handsome sum for Dana's services, she felt free to sit down with us. One arm wrapped around my shoulder, she ate and studied our guest. I studied him too.

"His name's Gereshown," I said. "He is a man of God. He's taken a liking to you."

"Many men do," she replied.

"I am not many men," Gereshown replied.

"Gereshown is going to enlighten us as to the ancient secrets of wisdom," I said. "So go ahead, Gereshown. Have your say."

Gereshown looked first at me, then at the waitress. "Listen carefully," he said. "The world is ruled by the ignorant and worthless. God alone, of all of the peoples of the world, has any value. The people are all in the depths of ignorance and vain illusion. All are worshippers of their own idols and imaginations, and have forsaken the knowledge and mention of God."

"I do not worship an idol," I replied. "Nor does Dana, nor any of those who frequent this tavern."

"Concepts, notions, and conventions are the greatest idols," the man said. "Desires and passions are the greatest idols. Names and titles are idols. Material things are idols."

"And you are saying that I should forsake all of this and worship God?" I said.

"Not until you renounce all authority but the authority of God, and learn to think for yourself, will you attain unto true enlightenment."

I laughed. "My friend, I do not speak of God, but I am more detached from worldly things than you are. You are fascinated by these women, while I see right through them. I do not care for all of my money, but if you had the chance you would take all of it."

"Wealth and beauty are gifts from God," the man said.

"You contradict yourself," I said. "Do you have nothing more to offer me?"

"Don't be so critical, David," Dana said. "Gereshown is right. The world is a crazy place. Nothing is what it seems. And I am worth more than you think I am."

I leaned back in my chair. "You two would be perfect for each other," I said.

"Maybe we would be," Dana said.

I gave her a look, but she seemed defiant.

"Tell me," the man of God said, "Do you disagree with anything that I have said?"

"Your words sound nice, but you don't have an ounce of understanding," I said to the man. "And your heart does not agree with the words your tongue speaks."

"Make your complaint," Gereshown said, resignedly.

"Only this," I replied, "If the world is so crazy, meaningless, and unrefined, then why would a perfect Creator create it? The kind of world you speak of wouldn't be worthy of Him. A perfect God would make a perfect creation."

The man was lost as to what to reply to this, but Dana spoke for him. "He's right, Emmanuel. In a perfect world, I wouldn't be working here. I wouldn't be poor. Men would be better than they are. The world has gone to hell."

"You both sound like unhappy children," I said. "Have a little maturity."

"And you should have a heart," the man said. "Moreover, if you refuse to respect me, at least do not fail to respect this lady."

I laughed. "If you knew what respect was, you wouldn't be such a miserable fool," I replied.

But Dana would have none of it. "Gereshown, dear, can I get you another drink?"

"Get three," the man merrily replied. "I am feeling generous today."

All I could do was smile in disbelief.

3

Despite my weariness of frequenting the presence of a man who spoke of God but clearly knew nothing of Him, I discovered that Gereshown was in town to sell certain handmade goods he had brought from his community and, as a merchant, I agreed to buy from him. I met him the next day in the precincts of the city, where he had three wagons full of carved figurines, exquisite pottery, and elaborate ornaments.

"How did a farmer come by these things?" I asked him.

"I am much more than a farmer, David. I am a son of God."

"I am sure you are."

"Do you doubt that?"

"I want more than anything to believe in something, but I doubt everything."

"Your loss."

"My gain."

"How so?"

"I'm not fooled by my own grandiosity."

"You're blind."

"At least I know it."

I evaluated the goods he had brought. Such rarities and expert craftwork could fetch a handsome price in the market. I offered the man forty gold coins for the lot.

"Can you afford that?"

"I can afford anything."

"That's a fortune."

"I'm rich."

"Done."

I gave Gereshown the money and ordered his servants to bring the wagons to the city's main street. People were lined along both sides, selling food and goods. A bustling crowd was walking through and engaging in its daily business. I found a friend of mine, a street vendor to whom I often sold my goods, and showed him the product.

"Rare and exotic," he said. "Where does this come from?"

"From the remnants of Seth's old community," I said. "In the farmlands. Apparently those people keep themselves busy."

"I'll give you sixty gold coins for it."

"I bought it for forty."

"It's worth more."

"More than forty?"

"I'll sell it for eighty."

"Fine."

I took my money. Sixty gold coins was more than what most men earned in a lifetime, but it meant nothing to me. I often wondered at men who set their hearts and affections on the things of the world. Such things could never satisfy and brought only pain and loss.

I had worked enough for the day. I went to the tavern and there I found Gereshown reclining by the counter. Dana seemed unusually interested in him. She winked at me when I approached them.

"I can see you've made our dignified friend here a rich man," she said.

Gereshown scoffed at her comment. "My wealth is only in God," he said.

I laughed. "You use big words, my friend. Here, take this."

I handed him a pouch full of gold coins.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Your product fetched more than I thought it would at market."

"I didn't know."

"I'm a just man."

"I can see that."

"Does that surprise you?"

"No."

"Yes it does."

"Men are not just any more."

"Apparently they are."

But Dana was all over Gereshown. "You're rich now. What are you going to do with your money?"

"I don't know."

I stared at him. "Don't you have to bring that back to your friends?" I asked.

"No. I made all that."

"Yourself?"

"Me and my servants. It took years, but I hadn't had a chance to sell yet."

"You'll have to spend it on something."

"I can save it."

"What for?"

"The future."

I turned to Dana. "Can I get a drink, Dana? All this talk is making me thirsty."

As the beautiful waitress poured me a cup, she motioned me to the side.

"I like him," she whispered.

"He's a dunce," I said.

"He's rich."

"So am I."

"You don't like me."

"And he does?"

"He's been staring at my breasts every chance he gets."

I laughed. "The old hypocrite."

"God's beauty," she said. "That's what he sees in me."

"He sees his own penis in you."

"Don't slander him."

"Don't disappoint me."

"I'm going after him."

"He has morals."

"I have breasts."

"Don't reduce yourself to this, Dana."

"Will you marry me?"

"No."

"Then I'll marry him."

"Let's see what he says."

"You're relenting just like that?"

"I want to see what a fool he is."

"Why don't you like him?"

"I like him just fine."

"Then what?"

"He gives me a headache."

"I think he makes sense."

"Everything makes sense to you."

"You don't."

"Because I won't fall for you?"

"Because you won't fall for anything."

"Your new friend will fall for everything. Go ahead and marry him."

"Two minutes."

"Five."

"Let's see."

I took my drink and went back to the counter. Gereshown was studying me.

"What were you two talking about?"

"Nothing."

"Come on."

"The weather."

"Where did she go?"

"I don't know. She'll be right back."

I took a sip of my drink.

"You know," I said, "You never have to work again."

"Why not?"

"You're rich."

"Do you see how great God is?"

"How so?"

"I loved Him, and He made me rich."

"Lots of miserable, unbelieving men are rich."

"Their wealth will pass."

"And yours will remain?"

"Whatever God wills."

"I'm tired of all your God-talk."

"Why is that?"

"You don't believe a word of it."

"Yes I do."

"You're on an ego trip."

"Don't patronize me."

"You're twice my age."

"Exactly."

"Ok, father."

The man laughed magnanimously. "You'll learn someday, son."

"Hopefully not from you."

I went back to my drink. Gereshown took out his gold and stared at it. A few minutes later, Dana returned. Gereshown gasped when he saw her, and I looked up. The waitress was wearing a slinky silk dress that left her shoulders and the tops of her breasts bare. She was wearing lipstick and eyeliner and her hair was done up. She sat beside us and crossed her legs, rubbing her bare foot against Gereshown's thigh.

I couldn't stifle a laugh. Gereshown looked at me, and then stared back at the beautiful girl helplessly. He was clearly smitten.

"Look what God brought you, Gereshown. Ask her if she'll marry you," I said.

But the man couldn't say anything.

"Do you like my dress, Gereshown?" Dana asked.

Gereshown took a gold coin and placed it in Dana's hand.

"What are you doing, you idiot?" I asked the man.

"Be respectful, David," Dana said.

"Such beauty deserves a reward, and much more than I can give," Gereshown finally said.

"You can give me a lot, Gereshown," Dana said.

"What can I give you?" Gereshown asked.

"A better life," Dana replied.

"Why don't you give her all of your gold, Gereshown?" I said. "Her beauty deserves it."

"What is gold to me without love?" Dana asked.

"You would have me love you?" Gereshown asked her, breathlessly.

"I would have you do more than that," she replied.

I rolled my eyes.

The other waitresses, and several men, came over to see what the occasion was.

"Why are you all dressed up, darling?" one of the men asked.

"Can't a girl make herself look nice?" Dana asked.

The other girls looked at the gold on the table and instantly recognized what was going on.

"I think our friend Dana's in love," one of the girls said.

"No, I think I'm in love," Gereshown said.

"Alright, everyone leave and give these two their privacy," I said.

The men looked at me, and then went back to their tables. The waitresses winked at Dana and went away.

Gereshown had managed to gather his wits back about him.

"I am eventually going to have to go back home," he replied. "Will you come with me?"

"You mean you want me to marry you?"

"Yes."

"You're a hopeless romantic, Gereshown." I said. "You could charm a camel."

"My love?" Dana said.

"This is getting intimate," I said.

"Yes?" Gereshown replied.

"Why do you want to go back home?"

"It's where the sons of God live."

"Why don't you tell them to come here? With all the money you have, you could buy this place. We could live together in the city."

"We've always lived in the country." *

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But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

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