

*God is love. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are eternally Love. This God of love, this God who is love has overflowed. This Triune God does not cease to love but eternally overflows. He is the surplus of love, the excess of love, the triumph of love.*

*God is the Lover par excellence. And His love is fierce, undaunted, jealous, comprehensive, and unabashed.*

*We say, "I love you." And we don't understand what we are saying. I say, I love you, honey. I love you, son. I love you, dear. And I am quite literally out of my mind. What am I am saying? What do I mean?*

*How does our God love? How does the Father love the Son, love the Spirit; Son love the Father, love the Spirit; Spirit love the Father, love the Son. How? And how do we take that glory upon our lips? How do we sing that? How do we imitate that? How have we been embraced by that?*

*Let there be light. Let there be heaven. Let there be earth. Let there be stars. Let there be fish and birds. Let there be beasts. And then God said something more. And then God said, 'Let us make man in our image.' It's all plural and wonderful, all love. Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. Let us love, and let us overflow in love, and let us make man to love and to overflow in love.*

*And let us make them male and female. Let us give them noses and fingers. Let us give her breasts and let us give him a beard. Let their love join our love. Let the world be our marriage feast, our wedding night. Let man eat and love, rule and love, name and love.*

*And when we sinned, when we had defiled the marriage bed, God made us clothes. He intended glorious robes of nobility, but when we rejected those, He made us skins to show some honor, to cover us with His love. Remember that I love you, He seemed to say, handing us those clothes he fashioned for us, as we left home on our own, looking for pigs to farm.*

*But He followed us; His loved followed us. His love carved a boat to save us and many animals from the furious flood. He sent us a dove with an olive branch in its mouth, and then in a glorious understatement, He painted the sky with a rainbow to remind us of His love, all purple and orange and lovely. It's for you, He said, so I'll never forget, so I will always remember you.*

*And His love followed us away from Babel into Ur and called our father Abraham to walk before Him. He visited Abraham at night in those days, pointing out stars, passing through pieces of butchered animals. See how I love you, He said, and sometimes we caught glimpses of what that might mean. See how I love you, He said, and provided a ram for Isaac, a substitute for the sacrifice. The Lord will provide. See how I love you?*

*But we quarreled and fought and turned the world ugly. With bent hearts, we sold brothers and killed brothers until we were starving for food in the famine, our garden obliterated, our feast turned to fast. But God in His love, God full of love raised up a little brother to deliver us from ourselves. The love of God prepared the best land, and a little brother as elder brother, a little brother with bread for the world, from God with love.*

*His love burst into flames on a bush a few years later. He couldn't help himself when our groans and cries came up to heaven. We had deserted His love, and despised His bread. But His love burned for us, and He came for us. He came with magic to woo us. He came with snakes and frogs and flies and hail. He came like a Tom Sawyer, giving the bully a black eye and hoping we'd notice. He loaded us with gifts and treasures and showed us a secret way out of the cave, through the sea, and remember how He turned around when Pharaoh and his legions were coming? Remember how He flicked His wrist and pushed the sea back together?*

*And He sang to us at the Mountain, but we didn't like His voice. It was terrible we said. He had written poetry for us on the top of the Mountain. But when Moses brought it down, we had gotten bored waiting and we were kissing a golden calf. And He sent us bread again, every day, but we got tired of that. And when we asked for meat, he gave that too, but we got tired of that as well. We forgot about the magic; we didn't care about the gifts. And when He offered to marry us, we shrugged our shoulders and agreed. He built a house and showed us how we could meet, how we could come close, how we could draw near.*

*He invited us into His presence. Our priest wore beautiful clothes, and God put stones on his shoulders and wrote our names six on one and six on the other. He wrote our names in the order of our birth. And he put precious stones on his chest, a stone for every tribe, precious stones for his precious bride. And He wrote our names on the stones on the high priests shoulders, so he could see our names in His presence when He called us into His presence in glory and beauty. So He would always remember us.*

*And He arranged our tents all around His tent. He gathered us all around him and held us close to Him, three in the north, three in the south, three to the east, and three to the west. And when He offered to give us a land flowing with milk and honey, we said He couldn't give it to us. His love was not big enough for the giants in the land, and then we changed our minds. But he thought it would better to wait, wait until we knew His love. But we didn't listen, and we died trying to take the land without His love.*

*But He said He would make us young again, and when we had become like children then we would know His love, and when we were children, His love would give us the land. And sure enough, we were born again in the wilderness. And we watched Him walk out into the Jordan River. He rolled up the water into a heap on one side and reminded us of our escape by night from Egypt. The priests stood there in the middle while we crossed, and He piled up twelve stones in the Jordan and twelve precious stones on the shore. He said He didn't want to ever forget that moment. He would always remember how He carried us over the threshold into our new home together.*

*He tried to sing for us again, and this time we hummed along a little. We were still reluctant, but He gave us our first city that way. Our first city fell down when we sang with Him and blew our trumpets. The walls came tumbling down. It was nice how He did that for us, how He danced with us and shook the earth and gave us that city. He said that He loved us then. But we saw the gold and the earrings and the other plunder and got distracted. We hid some in our tent, and didn't listen as He talked to us. He was saying something about love, I think, but we weren't listening.*

*God tried to teach us His song, how to sing and dance like Him, how the rest of the cities would fall down too if we sang His song and danced with Him. And we shrugged and took a turn or two. But we were so easily distracted. There were many golden calves, many beds, many others. Remember how he would come for us again and again? Remember how he picked us up when we were strung out, when we were hung over, when we had traded all His gifts for slavery? Seems like it was all the time in those days. And He came for us in His love. He came for us like a knight, like a hero. Always with His eyes fixed on us, always like a faithful bridegroom.*

*He told us that He would always come for us, always defend us, always protect us. And then we asked if He would mind if we married another husband. Would it be OK with you, if we had another King besides you, we asked, one day while looking out the window. You know, like the other nations? You aren't like the other lords, the other kings, the other husbands in the world. We can't see you, and the other nations, they can't see you either.*

*He said that would be OK. He said He would teach us about His love through this other man, this other lord. I'll choose a man to teach you how I love you, He said. He'll build a house for you, a house for my name, and I'll still meet you there. We'll still make love beneath the cedars of Lebanon. And we shrugged our shoulders, but God wouldn't let this occasion pass without gifts. He walked with our new king, and called him a man after His own heart. He taught him His dance and His song, and He filled our land with gold and treasures, because I love you, He said.*

*Fairly quickly we moved out on our own. We invited other men into the house and paid them to sleep with us with the dowry our God had given us. We paid our lovers with the tokens of His love. We spent our inheritance on riotous living. God began sending us letters around then, since we weren't around much. And when we didn't respond, He eventually sued for divorce. He was mad of course, but He was mad with love. He called us a whore and a prostitute. He said we were unfaithful, but kept on staring at us, staring with those same eyes of angry love.*

*We walked out with curses on our lips, screaming obscenities at Him. We hated Him. He did this to us, we told ourselves, we lied to ourselves. He said He would never leave us, we cried, with mascara running down our cheeks by the rivers of Babylon. And when our captors saw us, they asked us to sing one of the songs of Zion. Sing us the song He taught you, they mocked. But how could we sing His song? How could we sing His song after all of that?*

*He didn't let us go alone of course. He came with us; He followed us. His love came with us, like always. He said He would come for us again. He said He would make us young again. He said that when we became children again He would show us His love. Then we would know how He loved us. Somehow we were born again in the wilderness of exile. Somehow, we woke up one morning and He was carrying us home. He sang us His song again. And He repaired the walls of our city and sent gifts from the nations to begin repairing the house.*

*We didn't hear much from Him in those days, and others came around. And the others had money and power. They promised to protect us, keep us safe. But they never really turned out like they said. They used our house, the house God had rebuilt for us, for their own things, their own parties.*

*And then one day a man showed up at our door. He was a wild, mangy man with a leather belt and clothes made of camel's hair. His name was John, and he told us that our Husband was coming and to prepare for Him. We were confused, we were excited, we were angry. Where had He been? The house was crowded with our other friends and lovers then, but maybe we could try again. Maybe we could start over.*

*When the knock came, we were nervous. But when we opened the door, we were surprised. We had never seen Him before, but He wasn't how we had expected Him, how we imagined Him. He looked too young for starters, barely grown. He wasn't handsome like we thought. And when we asked Him who He was, He ran out into the Jordan River and stood in the middle of the stream and smiled. John piled the water up over him, and a dove came down and for a moment we heard His song, like a low rumble. Remember? He called to us. The other men inside laughed at Him, but then He went on. Watch, He said, as He made His magic. He played with a brood of vipers, and He turned water into blood-red wine. Remember? He asked. And He went walking across the sea like it was nothing, like it was dry ground, and later, with a flick of His wrist, He pushed a legion of demons into the sea. He sang us His song on a mountain, and gave us bread in the wilderness, bread for thousands. Remember? He asked. Remember, how I love you?*

*But we didn't remember. He wasn't what we hoped for. He wanted to throw all the others out of the house. He said they weren't good for us. They were thieves, He said. They were snakes and wolves. But we didn't believe Him. We told Him that we didn't love Him. We did not receive Him. He said that He still loved us, and there were tears in His eyes as He looked at our home. He said He wished He could gather us up into His arms. And we spit in His face and told Him to go to hell. And when the men got angry with the commotion, we offered them thirty pieces of silver. And they said that would be enough.*

*And do you remember that day when our God stood in our place? Do you remember that day when our husband received their taunts and blows? Do you remember when He stood there for us? Do you remember when they lifted Him up, when they drove stakes into His hands and feet, when they crowned our King with thorns? When He hung there looking at us like a knight, like a hero, like a bridegroom watching His bride come down the aisle?*

*And we beheld Him, despised and rejected, and we hid our faces, hating Him. Surely He carried our sorrows. He was wounded for us. He was afflicted for us. And He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.*

*This is God our Lover: the God who is Love, the God who ever loves: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. He is the overflow of love, the excess of love, the triumph of love. How do we say that? How do we say that love? How do we sing it? How does His song go?*

*It's something like this:*

*My song is love unknown  
My Savior's love to me  
Love to the loveless shown  
That we might lovely be.*