

Blessed

by Adam Sifre

The first thing Noah did, more or less, was plant a vineyard. The forty days and forty nights -- really months and months and months - had been hard, but waiting for the grapes to ripen and the wine to sweeten had been almost impossible. He sat in his tent, deciding whether to sick up or pass out. The wine had tasted terrible. That was fine with Noah, since the good stuff always went to God, anyway.

"All those people. Gone."

Noah looked up. "Huh? Who are thou?"

The stranger smiled. He was a lean man in a clean robe. Clean clothes were as rare in the camp as strangers, which was to say they didn't exist.

"I am who I am," the stranger said. He sat down next to Noah and produced a wine skin, though from where Noah could not have told you. Noah took a long pull on the skin. Delicious wine -- the best he ever tasted, washed over his tongue. More tears streamed down the old face.

"Why? Was it really necessary? You know I will always do your will, but --"

"Yes, I know. But why are you asking me this now? Where were all the questions when you were told what to do? When you knew what was coming?" The stranger smiled again. It was a sad smile. "Noah, do you know why you were commanded to build a window into the Ark?"

"Noah had thought about that often. The window was not necessary and, if anything, could compromise the Ark's integrity. He'd never question God's will, of course. But still, that had bothered him -- nagged at him off and on.

"It's because," the stranger said, "you were not to lose your humanity. You were not to ignore the horrors that came when the vaults opened. It was an evil world, yes. It had to be destroyed, yes. But it was not for you to ignore their pain, Noah. You had to see."

And he had seen. Seen more than any man should stand. Thousands, women, children ... babies, screaming at first, eyes round with terror. Then floating, some being thrown against the ark, others disappearing into the rain.

"They were just children," he wept. Why destroy children? They could not, were not, wicked. I don't understand."

The stranger took the wine from Noah and drank deeply. He sighed. "Again, now you ask? Where were your questions before the rains came and the oceans broke?" The man touched Noah's face with a soft hand. "Noah. The reason they all perished, if there is a reason, is because no one came to their defense. No one said it was wrong."

A moan, sounding much like the winds that came all those many months ago before the flood, escaped Noah's lips. He fell prone against the dusty ground. Dust that was extinct but now returned.

"Why, Lord? Please, tell your servant why? Why am I alive? Why are they all gone? Why, Lord, did Thou bring all this upon us?" Noah's pleas were swallowed by tears, a flood of regret that would batter his weathered face for the rest of his days.

The stranger sighed and patted Noah on the back of his neck. "Lord?

I am not your Lord, Noah.
I am merely the victor."

