

# Dinah's Walk

BY DIANE FLACKS

Dinah, daughter of Leah (of the soft watery eyes) and Jacob (who stole his brother's birthright through trickery and then wrestled with an angel) skipped along the hot sand of the desert town of Shechem, looking for other girls to play with. She had ten brothers, soon would have eleven, two mommys, one dotting Dad, and many handmaidens—but no girls to play with.

It was a very hard-edged existence, being the only girl-child of Jacob, though it is said, Jacob's family had daughters. Perhaps they were daughters of Jacob's handmaidens. All that is clear is that those daughters would later become a bargaining chip, but Dinah would not. Dinah was special. But that day, Dinah did not feel special, she felt lonely among all the hardness, and she longed for the soft eyes of her mother, Leah. But Leah's eyes had become red-rimmed with fury. Leah's sister, Rachel, the beautiful one, Jacob's second wife, had finally had a child, and was pregnant with another. Leah had had eleven children already by Jacob. So why be jealous of her sister's measly two? Was it because Jacob so clearly favoured Rachel and her one child, Joseph? It was true that when the house of Jacob was threatened by an enemy, Jacob always placed Joseph and Rachel in the safest possible location, leaving Leah and her brood to duck and cover near the front lines. Jacob was doomed to repeat the mistake of favouring one part of his family, as his father had done, and of course, as their Heavenly Father constantly did. All this favouritism was weighing heavily on poor Leah, corroding her soft eyes into shiny pebbles, as she strained to see some justice in the actions of men and Gods—or at least justice that favoured her. So lately Dinah had to go looking for softness in the round ant hills, the bright coins of sunlight reflected on her brothers' skinning-knives, lamb calves that survived, and new babies.

But Dinah knew there was more out there. She heard that in the town of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, there were girls who wore blazing stones around their breasts, red and green and blue, and who danced with bellies pushed out, and who laughed in their throats. Dinah was not beautiful, though not as ugly as her mother. She had her father's pale smooth skin, black eyes, and sensitive nature. She could always tell when someone was going to get hurt in the field, and always cried when a lamb died in childbirth. Her brothers often slept overnight working in the fields, but when they were home, they

loved to tease her for her gentle nature. They would threaten to kill a bird, then laugh when Dinah blazed in defense of the little creature. Dinah loved their laughter. She thrilled when they would throw her in the air, tickle her, and mock her girlish walk. Dinah's brothers at times were delighted with her, but just as quickly were able to forget she even existed. Dinah could not do the same. Her brothers' presence was loudly stamped on her consciousness every second of the day and night. They were always fighting and scheming for Jacob's blessing, and they mercilessly picked on little Joseph. Dinah thought Joseph was weird, but perhaps he was most like her; like her father. She picked on Joseph too, to please her older brothers, but she had no joy in it.

So, alone and aware, Dinah skipped after the sounds of bells. She arrived parched and wide-eyed in the outskirts of the town of Shechem, which was really a city compared to Paraad-aram where they had previously lived. There were many people, rushing and pushing and sleeping, and defecating here and there. Animals looked sideways at her, babies stood naked and gawked, but where were the girls? Where were the bells coming from? Suddenly, Dinah felt that sick crunch in her belly. Oh no, was someone going to get hurt in the field today?

She felt his gaze before she saw him. Shechem, meaning shoulders, son of Hamor, the Hivite. Hamor ruled the city after which he named his son. Shechem saw Dinah, and as it is written, took her, lay with her, and raped her.

It was not that simple a transaction for Dinah. First, there was the mud, it smelled badly of animal dung. Secondly, it was cold on the ground there where he grabbed her. It was dark and cramped. It was between two huts, and maybe she saw someone watching? Was it God watching? Or one of her brothers? Joseph? Fourth of course was the fact that there was physical pain and confusion. Fifth was the odd mix of her pain and Shechem's silly ecstasy, and finally sixth, why had the bells stopped? Dinah busied herself with these six complex thoughts as Shechem lay with her because she did not know what else to do. She

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Diana Dean, "Lifting the Fog" 35" x 32", Oil on Paper, 1990.

wanted to go home, and politely asked Shechem how to get to the fields of Jacob. He did not seem to hear. He looked at her and the oddest thing happened. His eyes became soft. Softer than her mother, Leah's, even. Soft soft like a cloud.

After the fire in his head was out, Shechem shook his massive shoulders and looked at Dinah, wondering what had come over him. She was not so lovely, and he had many women available to him; women that wore jewels and laughed in their throats. But Shechem's soul became drawn to Dinah, and he loved her and he spoke quietly to her gentle heart. He asked her if her father was indeed Jacob the Hebrew who just bought a few acres of fields outside the city limits. Dinah was heartened that Shechem of the big shoulders and rough hands knew of her family. She wanted to go home. She was afraid someone might have gotten hurt in the fields. But Shechem could not bear to part with Dinah now. Even according to the law of the Hebrews (which of course they hadn't actually received from the Holy One Blessed Be He at Mount Sinai yet) lo, even their own law would state that any man who has violated a virgin has to marry her, can never divorce her, and must pay her father compensation. Now, Shechem, being not a Hebrew, and not able to read laws that had not yet been written down, just knew that he wanted to marry Dinah because he really loved her. Even though he had just met her under abnormal circumstances and didn't even know her favourite food or birthday. Shechem beckoned men who appeared from nowhere and everywhere, and they took Dinah to his sprawling condo high on a hill in the inner city of Shechem.

Shechem was beloved by his father Hamor because of his football player shoulders. Hamor decided the honorable

thing to do in a situation like this was to ask Dinah's father for permission for the two love-birds (she was like a bird this little one) to marry. And he set off to talk to Jacob.

Now, Jacob, also being a sensitive soul and a veteran of wrestling with angels, had had a premonition that something was wrong. His sons were in the field so he decided that the best thing to do about Dinah was nothing. So Jacob kept silent, waiting for his sons to come in from the field. Maybe they would be willing to tell Dinah's mother, Leah, the news.

But when the brothers returned home and heard the news, they were enraged! No one defiles a daughter of Israel! They huffed and puffed until Hamor and Shechem arrived, and then they smiled, and said, "gentlemen, let's make a deal." Hamor offered them any price, all the daughters of the city, homes inside the city instead of in the outer limits. Hamor offered Jacob and his family a chance to become citizens of the town, to intermarry and become Hivites. Hamor himself removed an ugly, "No Hebrews Or Dogs allowed" sign from a fence post nearby. But the brothers were sharp. They'd been

waiting for this chance. They had a counter offer. They suddenly became very observant Hebrews. They wailed that they could give no daughter of theirs to a society of uncircumcised men, their law (which eventually would be written in stone) forbade it. If all the men of Shechem would be circumcised, they would take the offer and relinquish rights to the daughter. Shechem immediately said yes. Hamor was a little leery. "Does it hurt?" He asked. "Oh yes, but not forever."

Shechem convinced all the men of the town of Shechem that this was a good idea, presenting the tasty lure of all of Jacob's livestock, goods, and women coming into the fold of the Hivites.

And so, on the third day after the minor, but brutal surgery was performed door to door by a team of eight nervous surgeons, who all later went mad; as the men of the city lay in their tents, suffering the worst of their pain, the brothers of Dinah crept into town. Slowly, languidly, at their own pace, they slaughtered all the men and even Hamor and Shechem, plunging a sword right between his big shoulders. They found their sister and took her home. They carried her on their shoulders. Even Joseph celebrated her return. Jacob was not happy to see his daughter or his sons. Now they had really done it! All of the land of Canaan would be gunning for Jacob now. But the brothers were unmoved. They were not interested in having a whore for a sister.

Dinah herself found her mother, whose eyes looking into Dinah's once again became soft, and Dinah seemed to exhale herself into that soft place, or so we imagine, because she was never heard from again

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