

## Love At First Fight

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### *Song of Songs 5:2-6:3*

This next section of the Song of Songs consist of a back and forth dialog between the Shulamite and the daughters of Jerusalem. The only time the Beloved speaks is when his bride recounts his words. The time of this event will be sometime after the honeymoon. Perhaps this is their first fight.

Some scholars and students take this section to be a dream or a metaphor about the Shulamite losing her virginity instead of an event. However, this part of the Song of Solomon will be treated as an actual event told through the eyes of the bride.

While reading these verses of our lesson the Bible student will call to mind a very similar event which is described in 3:1-5. The author wants us to relate back to this story to help us understand the changes in the relationship. In the first event they were not married but separated. In the current event they are married and separated. The similarities cannot be coincidental. In both the Shulamite is in bed but awoken. In them she recounts the words of her beloved. He is not the direct source of his words. In both stories she goes about the city in the night or early morning hours to search for him. The watchman and the daughters of Jerusalem are involved in both searches. Initially she cannot find her Beloved. Yet at the end of both events they are suddenly reunited.

The scene opens with the Shulamite asleep in bed. This may not be a deep sleep since her *"heart is awake"* (5:2a). She is easily awakened by the knock on the door of the bedroom. The husband calls out for her to come open the door. He uses four terms of endearment for her. The reference to her as his sister, love, and dove have been used before. He also calls her his perfect one. As he has mentioned before, she is flawless. He motivates her to open the door and let him into the bedroom, because he has been out late and his hair is drenched from the heavy early morning dew which has fallen. He is perhaps cold and longs for the warmth of the bed with his new bride.

The Shulamite gives two rather flimsy excuses, why she cannot come open the door for him. First, she has taken off her robe. This is a term which may denote night clothing or undergarments. The second excuse is that she had washed her feet before getting into bed and does not want them to get dirty by walking across the room to open the door. This would mean she would have to wash them again upon returning to bed.

The Beloved reacts to his bride's less than enthusiastic response to his desires by trying to open the door himself. Finding it locked and unable to unlock it himself, he leaves. She was a locked garden in the 4:12 as his virgin wife in their bed chamber. She opens herself to his love. Now, he is locked out and cannot be with his wife. So he leaves.

Her heart which was awake while in bed asleep in verse two is now wide awake and yearning with strong desire for him. From what follows she is longing for him with awakened sexual desires. Her hands and even her fingers are dripping with myrrh. Myrrh can be in a solid or liquid form. It is often used metaphorically for the desires of physical intimacy. This is how her hands and fingers feel as she moves to unlock and open the door for him.

When she opened the door he was already gone. Where did he go? How long did he wait? Was he being selfish and impatient? All these questions and others are not the focus of this poem. He came and made a request as her husband. She responded with two feeble excuses which amount to: "Not tonight dear, I have a headache." So now that her heart is awakened to his request, she finds that he went away. Now her heart responds with even more longing. She recalls how she felt when she heard his voice. But her response has driven him away.

There is a similar poem in Egyptian love-poetry given from the male's perspective:

As for what she - my sister - did to me,  
Should I keep silent to her?  
She left me standing at the door of her house  
while she went inside,  
and did not say to me "welcome!"  
But blocked her ears in my night." (Curtis 142,143)

As in chapter three the Shulamite runs out of the house to search for her beloved. Perhaps this time she is also motivated by a sense of regret. In the first story she caused the separation by sending him away until morning. They were not married and she had given the correct response even though her heart longed to be with him. Now, as a wife, she has sent him away due to her cold and slow response to his desires and has caused a regrettable separation.

Upon discovering her husband has left, the bride immediately calls for him while she initiates a search. He cannot be found or heard from.

Although the Shulamite cannot find her beloved, she is found by the night watchmen. The manner in which they treat her is in dark contrast to their apathetic and passive response in chapter three. Perhaps in her haste to leave the house in search of her husband, she was only attired in her robe and veil and the watchmen mistook her for a prostitute. "No woman except a prostitute would be alone in the city at such a late hour. Middle Assyrian Law (ca. 1200 BC) indicates that a prostitute should be beaten with a club and have asphalt poured over her head" (Curtis 144). The "*keepers of the walls*" and the "*watchman*" are one and the same. They perhaps used their night sticks to hit her in an attempt to driver her away and back into her home. She informs the daughters of Jerusalem that this hurt and left a mark. In her attempt to flee from the guards, she dropped her veil or they tore it from her head to expose her face. To uncover a prostitute's identity would deter her from further such practices. The watchmen were merely doing their duty. This was not a case of rape as some commentators have erroneously surmised.

The abuse she has received from the watchmen has no deterring effect upon the Shulamite's search for her husband. In fact, she turns to the daughters of Jerusalem for help. What are these young women doing out in the middle of the night? Or perhaps, why has she awoken them? These questions are an unnecessary distraction. Keep in mind they are a poetic device in this poem and the strict rules of time and place found in a narrative do not apply.

If the daughters of Jerusalem find the bride's husband, they are to tell him she is "*lovesick*" (5:8). She longs for him to the point of feeling sick. She has them take an oath or make a promise. The same word "*charge*" used is also found in her reoccurring demand found in 2:7; 3:5; 8:4: "*I charge (adjure) you by the gazelles or the deer of the field.*"

The daughters of Jerusalem respond to the Shulamite's request by asking why her husband is so special, they need to help find him and inform him of her desperate condition (5:9). "What makes him so important or unique?" "What makes this Beloved of yours stand out, demanding such immediate attention from us?"

In response to the question by the daughters of Jerusalem, the Shulamite gives a glowing description of her Beloved husband. The Egyptian love-poetry contains Songs of Adoration which are similar to the Shulamite's. Also, the Arabian *wasfs* describe the object of one's love starting with one end of the body and ending with the other end.

The bride begins by describing her Beloved's general appearance and importance (5:10). He is "*white*" or better rendered "bright" or "radiant." He has this glow about him. Perhaps, this is a mention of how youthful and healthy his skin appears. The term "*ruddy*" is from the Hebrew word *adam* and means brownish-red. This was said of David (1 Sam. 16:12; 17:42). She then claims him to be better than ten thousand other men. He is one in a million.

Next, the Shulamite describes her Beloved from head to toe. He has a head of purest gold. Perhaps, regal like that of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2). His hair is like the jet black color of a raven with curly locks. As he has described her eyes like that of a dove, so she now compares his to doves. What exactly this metaphor indicates about his eyes is not clear. It could be their hue, softness, fluttering, etc. They do glisten like that of the waters of a river and the whites of his eyes are

like they were “*washed with milk.*” She mentioned they are also set on his face in perfect position and proportion. His cheeks are like a “*bed*” or “*tower*” of fragrances. Perhaps, he has a beard and it smells good. The olfactory scenes come into play when describing what attracts lovers to one another. Next his lips are described not by their appearance but by the sweet taste of his kisses. “*Lilies*” are a metaphor for kissing and “*myrrh*” for intimacy in ancient love poetry. His hands or fingers are like “*rods of gold.*” They are bronze-like in appearance and his finger nails are clean and shiny like “*beryl.*” The term “*body*” is best translated “*stomach*” or “*torso.*” It is like a slab of smooth and strong ivory. As her description of him continues, it reminds us of a Greek statue with legs like “*pillars of marble.*” His feet are at the base of each leg and they are like “*fine gold.*” She began her adoration of the Beloved by describing his head as “*fine gold*” and now his feet are like “*fine gold.*” He is pure gold from head to toe.

A return to the Beloved’s general appearance is found in 5:15b. His overall look is like the great majestic cedars upon the mountains of Lebanon. She returns to a description of his mouth which is sweet when they kiss. Note the Hebrew term for “*mouth*” is his inner mouth. Perhaps French kissing is implied. As she is flawless and the “*perfect one*” to the Beloved, he is beautiful from head to toe in her eyes. He is not only her Beloved but her friend.

The daughters of Jerusalem who questioned why they should get involved in their search for the Beloved are now very anxious to help. Where can they start searching for such a man? They have got to meet this husband of the Shulamite and get a good look at him.

As quick as he left, he is found. As he was quickly found in chapter three, he is just as suddenly appears here. The daughters of Jerusalem do not need to find him. She could not find him. He has found her. Their reunion is described in very sexually suggestive metaphors which are not too explicit and describe their intimacies back in the bedroom in as tasteful way as poetry can render. The metaphors used here are strikingly similar to those found in their description of the consummation of their marriage on their wedding night (4:12-5:1). In 5:1 he said “*I have come to my garden*” and in 6:2 she says “*My beloved has gone to his garden.*” The garden is her body. The “*bed of spices*” are her fragrances. She smells good to him. The metaphor of eating in the garden is used again for their lovemaking.

Her pronouncement of commitment to their relationship (“*I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine*”) is here reversed in 6:3 from that of 2:16. Feed the flock among the lilies is again a mention of the fact that he is kissing and physically intimate with her.

The story begins with the two of them separated. Her cool and perhaps coy response to his desires further separates them. In her disappointment and regret she searches but cannot find her Beloved. Her description of him from memory to the daughters of Jerusalem further enlivens her passion for him. Suddenly he finds her. They return to the bedroom. Their first lover’s spat is over and they kiss and make up. It is love at first fight which prevails. The bitterness of alienation is dissolved in the sweetness of their reunion.

### Questions:

1. Find comparisons between the first story in 3:1-5 and 5:2-6:3.
2. What four terms of affection does the Beloved use for the Shulamite?
3. What reasons does the Beloved give to his bride for letting him in the bedroom?
4. What excuses does she give for not opening the door of the bedroom?

5. How does she react when he tries to open the locked door himself? What does she find?
6. How do the watchmen of the city treat her?

7. Matching Song of Adoration of the Beloved

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|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ___ ruddy         | a. like a bed of spices               |
| ___ head          | b. like doves                         |
| ___ locks         | c. rods of gold                       |
| ___ eyes          | d. pillars of marble                  |
| ___ cheeks        | e. brownish-red                       |
| ___ lips          | f. like cedars of Lebanon             |
| ___ hands         | g. wavy and like ravens               |
| ___ body or torso | h. lilies dripping liquid myrrh       |
| ___ legs          | i. most sweet                         |
| ___ countenance   | j. fine gold                          |
| ___ mouth         | k. carved ivory inlaid with sapphires |

8. What two questions do the daughters of Jerusalem ask of the Shulamite?
9. Why do the daughters of Jerusalem have no need to assist in the search for the Beloved?

Find the contrasts between this poem 5:2-6:3 and the first story in 3:1-5.

**Application & Discussion:**

1. What can couples do when disagreements and disappointments come between them?
2. Should others play a role in helping reunite a troubled couple? Explain.

**Homework:** Find someone you have alienated and reconcile.