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## **David, Nathan**

### **When the cheque bounced**

**by Ralph Milton**

*You'll not find this story in the Bible. It's based on a conversation with a clergy person who told me about someone who came to her little church once a year and plunked a \$10,000 cheque on the plate. She talked about visiting that person and returning the cheque.*

*Her story somehow connected with the story of King David, his mid-life crisis, the affair with Bathsheba and the courage of Nathan, the prophet. It inspired this bit of fiction.*

David poured himself another scotch. Chivas Regal.

"Good stuff," he said to himself, smacking his lips, then reminded himself that he was already one drink over the daily limit he'd set for himself.

David was no dummy. He knew he was drinking too much. He just didn't quite seem able to keep it under control.

"Harrison," he said over the intercom. "I want to talk to you. And bring the Jerusalem development file with you."

While he waited, David unconsciously poured himself yet another scotch, downed it, and muttered "damn" as he realized what he'd done. "I shouldn't even keep the stuff around," he muttered to himself.

"Everything's in order sir," said Harrison as he came in. "The entire project is on schedule and well within budget. It was a stroke of genius sir – your takeover. You came in through the cellar while everyone was guarding the front door. Masterful. Positively, masterful."

"Yes, yes, I know, Harrison. You say that every time you come in the office and it is getting a bit tiresome, frankly. Where's the public relations report?"

Harrison's face flushed as he handed David a file.

"Twenty concubines at two hundred clams a head. Damned expensive, if you ask me," David grumped.

"That includes wardrobe, sir. And again, well within budget. And the tabloids are all speculating about how many of them you go into every night," Harrison sniggered.

David scowled. It was a week since he'd been into one of the concubines, and then his virility had failed him. What would the tabloids say about that, he wondered. "How about the ark?" David changed the subject.

"Almost five thousand people came by to see it last month, sir. At half a shekel a head, that 2,500 shekels a month. I expect we'll reach break-even on that project in a year, sir. A very good investment, sir. A masterful..."

"Yes, I *know*, Harrison," David interrupted. "That's all."

"Sir?"

"Leave, Harrison."

David paced up and down his huge oval office, looked out over the skyline of Jerusalem, Inc., and poured himself another scotch. He began to mutter to himself, as he often did after several drinks.

"Davey, boy, you've done it all. You're at the top of the heap. You flattened everyone who stood in your way, and you've got it made. Yeah, sure I've got it made, because I can't get through the day without a bottle of scotch." David picked up the bottle and spoke to it. "I've got it made, and you've got me snookered." He threw the half-empty bottle fiercely into the wastebasket and slumped down into his soft leather office chair.

Idly he flipped through the phone book on his desk, wanting some company in his misery but too proud to tell anyone that he was in control of everything but himself.

A name caught his eye. Nathan. He'd gone to school with Nathan. The two had been best buds for years. Bright kids, both of them. David had gone on to get an MBA, while Nathan had studied theology. He served a church just down the road, but the two men hadn't talked for years. But now David phoned him.

"Is the Reverend there?" David asked the secretary who answered. Then a moment later. "Nathan? Is that really you Nathan? It's me, your old bud, Davey. Listen friend, I need to talk to you. Can you come over?"

Several hours and several scotches later, David welcomed Nathan into his office. Both men were embarrassed, and the conversation was difficult.

"You've done well," said Nathan. "I keep reading about you in the paper."

"And you, Nathan." David turned on the charm that had served him so well so often. "I understand you have a very successful church. That must be a very enriching vocation."

"It's a small congregation." Nathan recognized David's charm and remembered how well he could use it to manipulate people. "The people struggle to be faithful. They succeed sometimes. They fail, sometimes. Why don't you come and worship with us? We can always use another sinner."

David winced a little at the last word. Good old Nathan always seemed to get the dig in. "I can do better than that, Nathan." David opened a desk drawer and pulled out a check book. "Here Nathan. Here's ten million to build yourself a church. A beautiful church. You deserve it. Your people deserve it."

Nathan was stunned. He took the cheque and walked out of David's office. And David sat in his chair smiling, feeling somehow that he had done something really worthwhile. For the first time in several years, he felt good about himself.

But Nathan was back the next morning, cheque in hand.

"It's not enough, David," he said.

"Give me a break, Nathan." David was furious. "I give you a check for a cool ten million, and you tell me it's not enough?"

"David," said Nathan. "God is not for sale. God doesn't want or need your money. God wants and needs your love."

"Then why did you take the money in the first place?"

"Because I'm a sinner too," said Nathan. "Like you, I get sucked in by money and for a while I thought you'd given me something. Then I went home and talked to God about it. God helped me realize this money would destroy me just the way it has destroyed you."

"You just talk to God, just like that?"

"Yeah."

David swallowed hard. He walked over to the window and stared out, not seeing anything. Finally he turned to Nathan. "Could you talk to God about me?" he rasped.

"Why not talk to God yourself. Just tell God what's eating your guts." David had moved over to the liquor cabinet. "You could start by talking about that stuff in there." Nathan took his old friend's hand firmly in his, looked deeply into his tired eyes, and left.

And for the first time since he had left his childhood home in Bethlehem, David cried – deep, body rattling sobs that he knew were the beginning of prayer.

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,  
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