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# BUILDING

## (BASED ON PSALM 127: 1-2)

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Martha Elias Downey

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I woke up one day and said, I am going to build a house  
I got a hammer and some nails  
and a big book from Amazon that promised "do it yourself without fail"  
I envisioned something extraordin-ary  
marble and glass, cedar and cherry  
impressive and functional  
smaller than Babel yet bigger than a stable  
And I took my first nail and I raised my hammer and I swung with all my  
might  
and this is how I broke my right....thumb

I woke up the next day and said, I am going to build a career  
I drew up a plan  
go to the best university in the land  
study smart, network hard, get straight A's  
hire myself out to the highest bidder and one day  
hopefully not too far away  
build my own business empire  
smaller than Rome, of course, but bigger than Bethlehem  
And I took my first exam, after a night of cramming, which is after all,  
obligator-y  
and this is how I made my first C...minus

I woke up a week after that and said, who needs a career?  
I am going to get back to nature and raise my own food  
I planted organic seeds  
pulled out organic thorns and weeds  
fertilised with organic manure from my organic pure-bred bovine herd  
I irrigated with purified water and tilled the nutrified ground from dawn till  
dusk  
I turned vegetarian, bought a juicer, and voted egalitarian  
The fields were turning ripe and heavy with harvest  
not enough that I could eat, drink and be merry for the rest of my life, no  
but certainly more than a handful of manna  
And so I sharpened my sickle while I watched the harvest moon grow  
and that was how I saw the hail coming out of no...where

I didn't go to bed that night as I watched my city of grain...maimed

my curses and threats did nothing to shame... this icy enemy  
 He marched in the gate and took what he wanted  
 He flaunted his cold power and flattened the tower-ing stalks of wheat  
 And only then did he beat his slow retreat

I woke up the next day and said  
 building a house is vanity, total insanity, all pain and no gain, a decaying  
 proposition  
 and building a career is vanity, too  
 false expectation, deflation, promises that never reach gestation  
 and self-sufficiency, it is a vain lie, pie in the sky, requiring more for less,  
 reaping nothing but stress  
 everything I have tried is vanity  
 is this the curse of humanity?  
 If there is a God, he is not on my side  
 He has taken me for a ride, and I want to get off!

I woke up the next day and there was a knock at my door  
 it was a carpenter, someone I thought I had met before  
 I can build you a house, he said, but it might take awhile  
 I use only the best materials and those don't come cheap or easy  
 Cheap and easy have already been tried and found wanting, I told him  
 What's the cost going to be? I inquired of the man who had come knocking  
 What do you have? he asked  
 Well, I said, due to some unfortunate circumstances, I am left with only my  
 two hands  
 and one of them is giving me some pain  
 an old injury is to blame  
 I know all about old injuries, he said, and pulled out an experienced hammer  
 I am ready to get started, he told me, and waited for my reply  
 Well if you want to build it, I said, I am willing to try...again

The arrangement had me puzzled, I had to admit  
 because there was nothing I was contributing to this equation  
 except the story of how I jumped from one failed situation...to the next  
 I had to know, so I asked  
 If you are the builder, then what is my task? Am I to be your assistant?  
 He laughed at the question  
 as if he heard it all the time, and said  
 You? Why don't you be....loved. Yes, beloved.

*Martha Elias Downey is currently pursuing an MA in Theological Studies at Concordia University with particular interest in Christian mysticism and the accessibility of Theology. This poem was originally performed as spoken word in conjunction with a paper presented at the conference, "The Bible as You Don't Know It: Hermeneutics and Biblical Studies for the Real World."*



*Berkeley Tree*

*Martha Elias Downey*