

THE LAST DAYS OF **KING SOLOMON**

A drama in two acts

By

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Act 1

SCENE 1, THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM AROUND 932 BCE

Zadok, Israel's High Priest,
stands in prayer.

ZADOK

Where are you, God? Are we to lose everything! That which you grant, you can take away. You have made your nation Israel a great power. Your chosen King Solomon will go down in history as at the wisest king of all time. He wrote the Song of Solomon, the Book of Wisdom, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and fifty Psalms. Solomon, the son of David, built the great Temple to you. He conquered all surrounding nations, united his people, and has built the most splendid palaces in the world. You spoke to him directly once, but now he has fallen from your favor. We know why...

Queen Mother Bathsheba, seventies,
enters.

BATHSHEBA

(Interrupting)

High Priest Zadok! This is a time for action not prayer!

ZADOK

Queen Mother Bathsheba! We need both!

BATHSHEBA

Is what I hear true?

ZADOK

Yes.

BATHSHEBA

Has the King been informed?

ZADOK

He has been asleep since sundown yesterday. And I can not locate the heir apparent.

BATHSHEBA

My grandson is playing with his new toys and says he can not come.

ZADOK

Playing with toys at At 44!

BATHSHEBA

Like father, like son! He loves horses. You and I must act alone. We must name a new Prime Minister. Is there a single trustworthy man in the country?

ZADOK

NO!

BATHSHEBA

Then YOU must be the acting minister until...

ZADOK

I have already taken the horse by the helm.

BATHSHEBA

We will prevail. I believe I was destined to be not only the King's princess but Queen Mother. I hope to die as Queen Mother

ZADOK

DESTINED or CHOSEN?

BATHSHEBA

What is the difference?

ZADOK

The Pagans speak of DESTINY. We speak of SELECTION.

BATHSHEBA

DESTINED will do.

ZADOK

Oh, those Greeks across the waterway forever writing their new Greek tragedies! Our real life Hebrew dramas are far better.

BATHSHEBA

And a lot funnier.

SCENE 2 SHEBA'S APARTMENT

The Queen of Sheba, mid-thirties, and Absalom, an extremely handsome young man, are chasing each other around the room.

SHEBA

Catch me if you can, my body guard. He-he.

ABSALOM

Only ONE of eight body guards.

SHEBA

But YOU guard best.

ABSALOM

My little Queen tart. And what if the King were to come in?

SHEBA

The wise and now older Solomon cares not about such things. I am his beloved. And he mine.

ABSALOM

He already has seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines!

SHEBA

My relationship with the king is of a higher order. (Beat) You're so handsome. (Unbuttoning his robe) I see women scream when they see you. And why do the older Israelites look at you so strangely.

ABSALOM

Now look at my Queen's pretty, pretty belly button.

SHEBA

You like it?

ABSALOM

And everything else. (Tries to kiss her)

SHEBA

Not so fast. (Brushing him aside) Beloved, you remember that plant you once brought me.

ABSALOM

Which one?

SHEBA

The one that got me so sick! You know where to get some?

ABSALOM

I may even know how to grow it.

SHEBA

This plant may cure by beloved king's ailments. You may even meet the king in person.

ABSALOM

I?

SHEBA

Yes. But a favor first. Tell me about my former daughter?

ABSALOM

Your former daughter. The current imposter Queen of Sheba?

SHEBA

You DARE call her the Queen!

ABSALOM

Fear not. I shall do what I must.

SHEBA

Like slash her throat!

ABSALOM

To tiny pieces. When I return to Sheba.

SHEBA

(Touching his breasts) Oh, my love.

ABSALOM

My queen, you mock me. You could have my head.

SHEBA

Never, my love Absalom. Never. Now go. Now I must go to my lover, the king.

SCENE 3 SHORTLY LATER, KING SOLOMON'S SUMMER
PALACE.

The Royal receiving room adorned with much gold, jewels, and velvet. The throne is laden with emeralds.

Gold replicas of the Temple and the Ark of the Covenant are on the walls. The room is dominated by four large statues to the pagan gods: the Goddess Astarte, Milcom, Molech and Chemosh. All the statuary is overshadowed however by two even larger gold horses, statues of his two favorite Royal horses, Gideon and Esau. The Queen of Sheba is playing the harp before the back of a large sofa chair, where King Solomon is asleep. Zadok appears to be praying, and Queen Mother Bathsheba fans herself.

SHEBA

(singing)

A time to keep, and a time to cast away. A time to rend, and a time to sew; A time to be silent, and a time to speak.
A time to love, and a time to hate; A time of war, and a time of peace.

BATHSHEBA

Awaken him! He has been sleeping for twenty hours.

SHEBA

I shall try again.

SOLOMON

(Shouting out) AND THERE IS A A TIME TO SLEEP! I am alive. But my head is killing me. I want more wine. Where are the servants?

BATHSHEBA

We have very few at our summer palace.

SOLOMON

(To Sheba) And from whence are those wretched lyrics you sing? And give me more wine.

ZADOK

From the Ecclesiastes verses.

SOLOMON

(singing mockingly)

A time to embrace, and a time to be far from
embraces. A time to seek, and a time to lose; A
time to keep, and a time to cast away...and so on.
Dear Queen of Sheba Don't you belong in Sheba?

SHEBA

I explained it to you last night. I am back because
the usurper overthrew me, her own kindly mother, and
now lies couched with her incestuous Uncle..

SOLOMON

Fret not, my beloved Queen. Kingdoms always tremble.
You bring joy. Now let me sing you a song:
"Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved, ah, you are
beautiful; your eyes are doves! Ah, you are
beautiful, my lover- yes, you are lovely."

SHEBA

From the Song of Solomon you wrote years ago? My
beloved King.

Solomon opens the window and hears
humongous crowd laughter. He
closes the window.

SOLOMON (cont'd)

What is that laughter about?

SHEBA

Your subjects are happy to have you as king.

SOLOMON

Nonsense. You are mocking me. (Opens window on the
other side of room, and get's a painful look) Has
someone destroyed the Temple? Sheba. Come here and
tell me what you see?

SHEBA

The High Place to Chemosh, the High Place to Milcom,
Molech and the Temple to Jehovah.

SOLOMON

I cannot be going blind!

SHEBA

Why, My Lord!

SOLOMON

I see nothing. Either *you* are insane or *I* am insane.

He suddenly notices Zadok

SOLOMON

What are you doing here! Where is my chief minister Haddad.

ZADOK

He is unavailable.

SOLOMON

Why?

ZADOK

He is away. Visiting your brother-in-law.

SOLOMON

I have thousands of brothers-in-law. Which one?

ZADOK

The Pharaoh.

BATHSHEBA

We should have never have married those Egyptians.

SOLOMON

We must capture and slay Haddad. He is a traitor.

ZADOK

That is already in order.

SOLOMON

Is there a single trustworthy man in the country?

ZADOK

Afraid not. Perhaps, you need a long rest.

SOLOMON

Exactly what the enemies of the Kingdom would want. (Sips more wine). Oh, my poor head. (Begins sighing from pain)
Chief Priest. Look out that window, and tell me what you see.

Zadok moves toward the window and opens it.

ZADOK

I see the pagan temples next to Jehovah's Temple.

SOLOMON

Tell me exactly what you see!

ZADOK

The High Place to Chemosh, the High Place to Milcom,
and the Temple to Jehovah.

SOLOMON

You see the Temple?

ZADOK

Yes. Can you?

SOLOMON

I can not see the Temple!

ZADOK

Can you see the pagan temples?

SOLOMON

No, I can not.

ZADOK

This is bizarre.

BATHSHEBA

Perhaps the wine is blinding you.

SOLOMON

Sometimes a little inebriation helps dull the pain of ruling a chaotic country. You know there was a cure I used for a while. We had that visit from the African king who brought us those special herbs? But alas now we are completely out.

ZADOK

It caused hallucinations!

BATHSHEBA

I remember a glare in your eyes afterward.

ZADOK

I have some sad news.

SOLOMON

Something worse than the betrayal by my prime minister

ZADOK

This morning Jacob collapsed and suddenly expired.

SOLOMON

Our nation has thousands of Jacobs.

ZADOK

Your beloved horse went into the sunset to be with his ancestors.

SOLOMON

My prize horse Jacob? (Begins crying) I remember when we rode in battle together. And you wait how long to tell me! I should have you horsewhipped. We must have an official state funeral.

BATHSHEBA

For a horse!

SOLOMON

This is Jacob! I shall spend this afternoon alone at his stable. And there *will* be an official state funeral.

ZADOK

It is unheard of!

SOLOMON

I am the king! You incompetent scoundrel.

BATHSHEBA

We will be the laughing stock of the world. Would our honored foreign visitor not agree?

SHEBA

Indeed not. Before my departure we had a state funeral for three of my dogs, two of my cats, and TWO horses.

ZADOK

What!

SHEBA

Horses, carriages, mourners and all. We even had a state funeral for a 200 year old fallen tree.

ZADOK

And did the tree funeral also have horses, mourners, and carriages?

SHEBA

Yes.

ZADOK

And a casket?

SHEBA

No, because that would have entailed felling another like tree. Instead the fallen tree was paraded through the capital and then turned into a royal table and chairs.

BATHSHEBA

Do you also have official state funerals for royal flowers?

SHEBA

Well, yes. In fact, last year before the insurgency..

SOLOMON

Stop! And what else?

ZADOK

Two of your wives have died within one day of one another. We are preparing the funerals.

SOLOMON

Which ones?

ZADOK

Miriam and Serula. Both foreign and with good dowries..

SOLOMON

I can't quite remember them. After all, they're only two out of seven hundred.

BATHSHEBA

They are the mothers of five of the royal children.

SOLOMON

Now I remember. I thought both women had already died.

BATHSHEBA

Not until yesterday.

SOLOMON

First or second tier.

ZADOK

The latter. Furthermore, we now govern both of their kingdoms through annexation. You must attend the funerals.

SOLOMON

I can barely remember what they look like.

BATHSHEBA

That may be, but you must attend for appearances sake.

SOLOMON

Give them official state funerals, of course. You and mother can attend in my place.

ZADOK

(Interrupting) I fear more news. Princess Tamar is waiting outside for you.

BATHSHEBA

That unbalanced woman! She comes when the kingdom is at its weakest. My son, author of 3000 proverbs, I have but one request of you.

SOLOMON

Yes Mother.

BATHSHEBA

Strangle her!

SOLOMON

My only sister?

BATHSHEBA

I have never asked you to strangle anyone before. You owe me this one favor.

Look at my arm (raises her left arm which shows a major scar) Here is where she bit me on my wedding day. The scar has never healed

SHEBA

Oh dear Queen Mother.

BATHSHEBA

My David is the father of 16 sons and one daughter. She is more troublesome than the 16 sons combined. Her selfishness cause the deaths of both Absalom and Amnon. And then caused a civil war that kills at least ten thousand Israelites.

SOLOMON

Stop!

Royal trumpets blare. Tamar enters wearing a shabby blood stained dress and a tiara.

SOLOMON

My dearest Sister.

TAMAR

Hail to your Majesty.

BATHSHEBA

Your dress is blemished.

TAMAR

The dress I wore the day of the tragedy. Please do not touch it, anyone. For it is fragile from age. And do you see the torn tunic beside it? That is the tunic I tore after the violation. And the blood? The blood of my stolen virginity.

ZADOK

So tragic. One must not overly grieve over past hurts.

TAMAR

When a young maiden loses her virginity she is destroyed for life. (Looking straight at Bathsheba). An adulteress I am not.

BATHSHEBA

But that was fifty years ago.

SOLOMON

And about your children?

TAMAR

I have heard not from them in five years. Nor do I care to.

BATHSHEBA

So sad! And your two husbands?

TAMAR

One died, the other fled. No loss at all. A far greater tragedy.

BATHSHEBA

Who could that be?

TAMAR

Does your memory fall so short, dearest Mother. Absalom of course. The death, honor and glory of our martyred brother. Certainly, our young guest and ally, her majesty the Queen of Sheba knows.

SHEBA

I am but a stranger in these parts, here only at the kindness of his Imperial Majesty. But often, even thousands of miles away I hear of Absalom's adventures.

TAMAR

I see it clearly before mine own eyes. My brother Amnon pretended to be sick and pleaded to our father, King David: "Please let my half-sister Tamar prepare some fried cakes so that I might take nourishment from her hand."

SOLOMON

This was fifty years ago, sister. Please stop

TAMAR

Obedient and gullible daughter that I was, I went to Amnon's house to prepare these cakes before his eyes. Then I took the pan and set out and put the cakes before him. He asked everyone one to leave but said to me: "Bring the nourishment into the bedroom, that I may have it from your hand." He then seized me and says "Come! Lie with me, my sister!

SHEBA

A scoundrel indeed!

TAMAR

I pleaded, "Please let me go. Where can I take my shame? And it will bring shame to you. He did not heed my plea, and overpowered me.

ZADOK

Please stop!

TAMAR

That's exactly what I said. But he said "Get up and leave,". I replied, "No, brother, because to drive me out would be far worse than the first injury." He called his attendant and said, "Put her outside, away from me." I put ashes on my head and tore the long tunic in which I am clothed.

SHEBA

You suffer so much. What did the King do? (Feigns weeping)

TAMAR

Nothing.

SHEBA

NOTHING! Oh what a tragedy indeed.

SOLOMON

We cannot demur over past grievances. We are racked by internal dissent and surrounded by enemies.

TAMAR

One statue and one shrine can do that much damage!

BATHSHEBA

Jerusalem does not even have a statue to King David!

A commotion is heard outside.

ZADOK

Let me check on the commotion is a all about.

Zadok exits.

TAMAR

Both leaders and ordinary people have already given support and funds to this request.

SOLOMON

Please stop..

TAMAR

I have a more compelling reason. (Clears throat) We must dispel those rumors about our dear Mother.

BATHSHEBA

What!

TAMAR

That my violation was induced by this Queen Mother to destroy the two brothers who wished to claim the throne.

BATHSHEBA

SHE COMMITS TREASON!

ZADOK

Tamar, such rumors are false!

SOLOMON

The Queen Mother is a peace maker.

BATHSHEBA

First you call me a murderess and then an adulteress. As for Absalom raping you! You made up the story!

TAMAR

If I lied, hang me.

BATHSHEBA

You must prove it!

SOLOMON

There will be no hangings!

Zadok enters with Absalom
Everyone begins screaming with the exception of Sheba.

SHEBA

Why the screams! He is only my bodyguard.

TAMAR

My brother returns! He did not hang! He looks the same!

SOLOMON

Who are you?

ABSALOM

I am the Queen of Sheba's bodyguard.

SHEBA

He is only ONE of my eight bodyguards.

SOLOMON.

Are you he? Or his ghost!

ABSALOM

Who?

SOLOMON.

Absalom.

ABSALOM

I beg your pardon, Sir.

SOLOMON.

You're the ghost of my older half brother.

ABSALOM

No, sir. I am not a ghost. Feel me. I have flesh.

Solomon pinches him. Then pulls his cheeks.

SOLOMON

So you are.

ABSALOM

But you may be almost right.

TAMAR

Oh? Speak up.

ABSALOM

Some say that Prince Absalom was my biological father.

BATHSHEBA

Explain.

ABSALOM

So my mother and aunt tell me. But I am not his legitimate offspring. (Beat) Your majesty knows all three of us. Me and my two mothers.

SOLOMON

I meet millions of subjects. But two mothers?

ABSALOM

Your name is now synonymous with wisdom throughout the world. Two harlots claimed a child. Remember?

SOLOMON

One the mother. The other an imposter.

ABSALOM

I am that baby. But for the king's wisdom, I would be no more.

TAMAR

Yes, THE REAL mother cried at the sight of her baby about to be knifed. The other expressed no emotion.

ABSALOM

The complete story is even better.

SOLOMON

Pray tell. A new revelation even to me.

ABSALOM

My aunt deceived you. She was an actress who could make you believe anything. Her sister, my biological mother, was slow-witted but truthful. My aunt won the baby, tried to extract money from Absalom and failed. She tried to return me to my mother, who did not want me either. So in the end my aunt paid my mother to take me back.

SOLOMON

So you had two non-mothers. Where are they now?

ABSALOM

I do not know.

SOLOMON

Do you care?

ABSALOM

It's hard enough being the son of one prostitute, let alone two.

TAMAR

My dear nephew. You must come to live with me.

BATHSHEBA

He may be an imposter.

SHEBA

But he is my bodyguard, oh Princess Tamar.

TAMAR

You have seven other body guards. My resurrected brother returns. I will find another bodyguard for you.

BATHSHEBA

Now I know you've gone mad!

SOLOMON

Would you all leave. Absalom, remain behind.

TAMAR

And you deny your only sister's request!

SOLOMON

What request?

TAMAR

To take my nephew Absalom into my home.

SOLOMON

What gives you the idea he is not a fraud?

TAMAR

Because I know it.

SOLOMON

How?

TAMAR

I look into his eyes and I know it.

SOLOMON

That is hardly convincing proof.

TAMAR

This is what my heart tells me.

SOLOMON

Would you be willing to give up your campaign statue and shrine campaign if I grant you your wish?

TAMAR

I may ...to be with my own nephew.

SOLOMON

Your wish is granted.

TAMAR

Oh brother. I will take care of our nephew to the best of my ability.

SOLOMON

If he's our nephew.

TAMAR

Have faith.

SOLOMON

Oh, that again!

Zadok, Tamar, Sheba, and Bathsheba exit.

SOLOMON

Absalom. If that's your name. Sheba says you can help me. An African king once had a plant...

ABSALOM

Would you like some?

SOLOMON

You already know what I want?

ABSALOM

Of course. The Cannabis plant. And you deserve it with all the pressures on you. It will relax you.

SOLOMON

You are a man to my own heart. Perhaps you really are my nephew!

ABSALOM

I may even have some seeds from my cuttings.

SOLOMON.

How long will it take for them to grow?

ABSALOM

Several months. But I have some for immediate use.

SOLOMON.

Remarkable.

ABSALOM

Thank you. Uncle Solomon.

SOLOMON.

What did you call me! Not even my children take such liberties.

ABSALOM

I thought I might be able to call you Uncle Solomon since you may be my father's brother. I ask your mercy. I am unworthy of being in your presence. Perhaps I should leave.

SOLOMON.

Not so fast!

ABSALOM

No I must leave, Sir!

SOLOMON.

Remain or I will have your neck cut off.

ABSALOM

Yes, Sir.

SOLOMON.

(Winking) I am very grateful that my beloved Sheba found you.(Giggling) Now behave yourself with her.
(Winks)

ABSALOM

(Smiling)Yes, Sir.

SOLOMON.

Could you pour me more wine?

ABSALOM

Yes, Sir. I may have some of that plant in my pocket.

SOLOMON

Give it to me!

ABSALOM

Here, your Majesty!

SOLOMON

THANK YOU! Nephew Absalom! Since you have succeeded at this task so quickly, I have an even more important one for you. I shall ask you to accompany me to the Temple.

ABSALOM

Yes, Uncle.

SOLOMON

I want you to live in the Palace of Princess Tamar...As a prince.

ABSALOM

If you insist, Sir.

SOLOMON

And now can you scratch my back?

ABSALOM

Gladly, Sir.

SOLOMON

Scratch some more. That feels so good.

ABSALOM

Thank you, Sir. (Continues scratching)

SOLOMON

Now I shall need you again tomorrow. But you must come back with more weed. Now continue scratching my back.

ABSALOM

Gladly, Sir.

SOLOMON

Scratch some more. That feels so good.

ABSALOM

Thank you, Sir. (Continues scratching)

SOLOMON

Now you must do what Princess Tamar wants you to do.

ABSALOM

Yes, sir.

SOLOMON

Do you object to leaving Sheba's home

ABSALOM

Whatever His Majesty tells me to do, I will do. .

SOLOMON

Now continue scratching my back.

ABSALOM

I am enjoying this. I hope you are too.

SOLOMON

Scratch some more!

ABSALOM

Yes, Sir!

SOLOMON

And more!

ABSALOM

I like this!

SOLOMON

Do you really like this!

ABSALOM

I do! Give me more!

SOLOMON

Now scratch my hand.

ABSALOM

Yes, your Majesty!

SOLOMON

Are you that way?

ABSALOM
No, Sir. But if you enjoy it?

SOLOMON
I thought I might.

ABSALOM
And?

SOLOMON
I don't.

ABSALOM
Ah, I am sorry.

SOLOMON
But we will have to try again sometime. After sleeping with thousands of women, we must both be willing to experiment with new things.

ABSALOM
Why of course!

SOLOMON
I shall alert the guards that you are to have free access to my private chamber at all times.

ABSALOM
At your service, Sir. My Lord and King. I take my leave. (Exits)

Sheba enters.

SOLOMON
A remarkable young man!

SHEBA
My bodyguard is indeed a remarkable man.

SOLOMON
I need your wisdom and opinion. Whom shall I appoint Prime Minister?

SHEBA
Your cousin Eliam.

SOLOMON
We think alike.

SHEBA

A rare animal. Trustworthy beyond belief.

SOLOMON

But why are these "trustworthy beyond belief" so lacking in brains?

SHEBA

Ask not too many questions. Because they are trustworthy beyond belief. Haddad and Jeroboam are brilliant, but they are traitors.

SOLOMON

Their treachery makes the crown even more dependent on the clergy! They will seize this opportunity to strengthen their position. Even the "Blessed" Zadok.

SHEBA

Indispensable leeches. Foxy, incorrigible and corrupt!

SOLOMON

Unfortunately we believe God created men.

SHEBA

How foolish! We know that men created God. Dealing with the self anointed intermediaries involves massive bribery, and sometimes blackmail. I dealt with them very effectively.

SOLOMON

How? Oh wise Sheba.

SHEBA

Submission and bribery.

SOLOMON

You submitted and bribed!

SHEBA

Recognize when you are defeated. As Sheba's only effective ruler I learn the hard way.

SOLOMON

But we in Israel have been set aside for a special purpose by Yahweh, a divine mission. They are the conduit to God, or so they say.

SHEBA

Oh that nonsense! Each kingdom claims a divine mission

SOLOMON

But you converted ten years ago.

SHEBA

I did, but five years ago I came to my senses. When my subjects rebelled, I prayed to your god, and he did nothing. So I got rid of him. Actually the moon and sun gods are more responsive to my needs.

SOLOMON

But I am now stuck with this clergy.

SHEBA

Do not call them clergy. THEY ARE PREDATORS! No one is free from their snare.

SOLOMON

But WE should be able to control them. Have you and I not fought great armies and quelled internal insurrections? Surely... tony

SHEBA

Foreign armies are less dangerous than domestic priests and prophets. They demand a tenth of even your country's wealth and only comprise a small portion of the population. Pure highway robbery in the name of some deity. Have you ever seen a starving priest or a skinny prophet.

SOLOMON

Of course not. How much did you pay them?

SHEBA

Fifteen percent. Your Majesty gets off cheaply.

SOLOMON

How do I keep them quiet?

SHEBA

Bribe them more.

SOLOMON

The rest of the country would rebel.

SHEBA

Declare your own divinity, and get rid of the clergy. Many monarchs are doing the same. Outside of this Yahweh thing, how gullible are the Jews?

SOLOMON

Not very.

SHEBA

Well didn't your father say that once some apparition came to him and told him that from his loins a saviour would save not only the Jews but the whole world.

SOLOMON

I have trouble keeping this country together, let alone conquering the whole world.

SHEBA

There is another solution.

SOLOMON

Yes?

SHEBA

Hang them.

SOLOMON

A thought. But they are too useful.

SHEBA

Then we come to the next solution.

SOLOMON

Marry 'em?

SHEBA

Right.

SOLOMON

Already on the agenda. My granddaughter will marry Zadok's son.

Solomon motions Sheba to be silent. He then shifts his arm back, pulls the curtain, and Zadok appears.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
I thought you were going to dine.

ZADOK
Ah, your Majesty, I had ...

SOLOMON
(Interrupting) You must join the others.

ZADOK
But your Majesty...

SOLOMON
(Interrupting) Your presence is needed at the dining table. And as you may know, Eliam will be the next Prime Minister. Inform him likewise.

Zadock speeds off.

SHEBA
When did you realize he was...

SOLOMON
(Interrupting) Always.

SHEBA
Why not encourage other religions. In Sheba, we have many religions. Generally it's good to keep them in competition. Keeps them all on their toes.

SOLOMON
Our priests won't stand for the competition.

SHEBA
I have no more solutions, oh wise Solomon.

SOLOMON
You have helped me to think, o Sheba. As you have lost your kingdom so it means that mine too will go the day I die.

SHEBA
We sovereigns have it not easy.

SOLOMON
Yes, remember the curse of God.

SHEBA

What is that?

SOLOMON

That the people should have no king. That is what God supposedly told the people who wanted someone to defend them.

SHEBA

Well you have.

SOLOMON

But God also told them that a king would tax them and make them work. They said they did not care.

SHEBA

And now they do. These humans are all alike.

SOLOMON

Sometimes I think of abdicating to my son. But he is yet unprepared.

SHEBA

Abdication. No way!

SOLOMON

Then what?

SHEBA

Either die or stay the course.

SOLOMON

I stay the course.

SCENE 4: SAME, THREE DAYS LATER

Zadok enters. Solomon continues reading.

ZADOK

Your cousin Eliam gladly accepts the ministry.

SOLOMON

I shall name him Prime Minister tomorrow. Anything else.

ZADOK

The Queen of Sheba has changed I see. And not for the better.

SOLOMON

Do not disparage our Mekita, the precious Queen of Sheba. Her coffers keep the kingdom going. What other news?

ZADOK

Another revolution is brewing.

SOLOMON

Benjamites? Perhaps the Danites?

ZADOK

Our own Judeans.

SOLOMON

Ungrateful morons. After they get the best spoils in the system. What's their problem!

ZADOK

Complaints. High taxes and forced labor. Too many foreign wives, expensive horses, high taxes, and worst of all, foreign gods.

SOLOMON

By whom.

ZADOK

Their King.

SOLOMON

I do not worship false gods. Why can't people worship whomever they want?

ZADOK

Your father is turning over in his grave. There is but one religion.

SOLOMON

Have you ever tried to convert an Ammonite?

ZADOK

Do you know what scripture says?

SOLOMON

It's only opinion.

ZADOK

And if God says this, can there any doubt?

SOLOMON

Perhaps! You see, we still do not know what God thinks.

ZADOK

Why!

SOLOMON

Because it was written by humans who say they represent God.

ZADOK

Blasphemy!

SOLOMON

Actually it is written by you and the Levites.

ZADOK

As told to us by God! Let me quote.

SOLOMON

Where and when?

ZADOK

In a dream..

SOLOMON

Your dreams! You can not use your dreams as the basis of a religion.

ZADOK

You are lashing at prophets because you violate our sacred contract with God. Listen. I know that sacred contract by heart. "He whom you set over you as king must be your kinsman; a foreigner, who is no kin of yours, you may not set over you."

SOLOMON

I am related to half of the kingdom by blood, and the other half by marriages.

ZADOK

Correct. That is the only part of the contract you have fulfilled. Listen to the rest. "But he shall not have a great number of horses.(Twelve thousand) Neither shall he have a great number of wives,(70) lest his heart be estranged, nor shall he accumulate a vast amount of silver and gold. Let him not become estranged from his countrymen through pride, nor turn aside to the right or to the left from these commandments. "

SOLOMON

I can certainly be forgiven for loving horses. My gold is needed to keep the kingdom going, my marriages are the political glue that holds the kingdom together.

ZADOK

Rationalizing?

SOLOMON

The passage is written by the Levites. Primarily to limit the power of the king, which they originally opposed anyhow. And you are passing this off as sacred scripture.

ZADOK

Do you really believe that?

SOLOMON

I do.

ZADOK

The people say they made a mistake in choosing a king; They cite Samuel. "Samuel delivered the message of the LORD in full to those who were asking him for a king. He told them: "The rights of the king who will rule you will be as follows: He will take your sons and assign them to his chariots and horses, and they will run before his chariot."

SOLOMON

Every king does this.

ZADOK

Listen further. " He will also appoint from among them his commanders of groups of a thousand and of a hundred soldiers.

He will set them to do his plowing and his harvesting, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. This is exactly what you are doing.

SOLOMON

These passages are boring and irrelevant.

ZADOK

He will take the best of your fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his officials. He will tithe your crops and your vineyards, and give the revenue to his eunuchs and his slaves."He will take your male and female servants, as well as your best oxen and your asses, and use them to do his work. He will tithe your flocks and you yourselves will become his slaves." This too.

SOLOMON

Now listen to what else is said. "When this takes place, you will complain against the king whom you have chosen, but on that day the LORD will not answer you." And I choose not to answer.

ZADOK

Your kingdom may be safe for a while.

SOLOMON

Those Levites and their allies plot against me. And what does this God who is supposed to be my ally do?

ZADOK

But which God?

SOLOMON

There is only one God. But there can be many forms. I am willing to worship any of them. But the Jews won't have it.

ZADOK

You deny Moses and the Burning Bush?

SOLOMON

Plagiarized from the Mesopotamians.

ZADOK

Abraham? And Jacob? And Joseph? And..

SOLOMON

Our prophets are unimaginative. Taken from the Egyptians, Syrians, the Phoenicians, the Hashemites, the Moabites or whatever. .

ZADOK

And the feats of your father?

SOLOMON

A great general, and with your help, gave divination to his rebellion and victories.

ZADOK

You must become God fearing!

SOLOMON

Listen. I too once fell under the spell of the fiction you and the priests made up. But my foreign wives taught me differently. After marriage, they all wanted their small chapels. Then I learned about their religions. All had stories similar to ours, written many centuries earlier. I was amused. We copied.

ZADOK

And about the revelation God gave you?

SOLOMON

Those revelations came through what you said were your dreams.

ZADOK

I shall pray.

SOLOMON

Keep your clerics under control.

ZADOK

I have tried all I can.

SOLOMON

But I intend to do something about it.

ZADOK

What is that?

SOLOMON

I intend to remove all Levites from their priestly office, and put them to work.

ZADOK

With whom.

SOLOMON

Women.

ZADOK

You are not only Godless, but insane.

SOLOMON

I could hang you for treason for saying that.

ZADOK

May I be excused?

SOLOMON

By all means.

ZADOK

But may I ask one, actually two, questions?

SOLOMON

By all means.

ZADOK

Why can you not see the Temple you constructed thirty five years ago, and why do the Temple lights go out every time you drop by.

SOLOMON

I do not know. But I shall find out shortly. And you believe I have lost my sanity?

ZADOK

Why of course not. I wish you well.

SOLOMON

And of course, you will not reveal our conversation to anyone.

ZADOK

Of course not. But one more thing. May I cite you a psalm?

SOLOMON

At your pleasure.

ZADOK

Unless the LORD build the house, they labor in vain who build. Unless the LORD guard the city, in vain does the guard keep watch. (Beat) Familiar?

SOLOMON

I wrote it years ago perhaps. Under the guise of false belief.

ZADOK

And now.

SOLOMON

Now, I no longer believe in children's fairy tales.

ZADOK

Good day, your majesty.

END OF ACT 1

Act 2

SCENE 1 A DAY LATER

Absalom is seated, his arms and feet tightly bound. His mouth is gagged. Solomon is composing lyrics and puffs on a weed.

SOLOMON

Now let's see. (Picks up pen) "What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is missing cannot be... " What is the right word? "Supplied?" Does that sound right to you. I know it is difficult to speak.

ABSALOM

(Nodding head) M-m-m

SOLOMON

Thank you. You like it I see. (Continues writing again) "Though I said to myself, Behold, I have become great and stored up wisdom beyond all who were before me in Jerusalem, and my mind has broad experience of wisdom and knowledge " Yet when I applied my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly, I learned that this also....?" What's the best wording here? (Beat) "I learned that this also IS A CHASE AFTER WIND" Does this sound all right to you?

ABSALOM

(Nods again) M-m-m.

SOLOMON

You are being so helpful. Now let's continue. (Continues writing) "I have seen all things that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a chase after wind. For in much wisdom there is much sorrow, and he who stores up knowledge stores up sadness." Again does not sound right. Mmm. Let me substitute "grief" for sadness. Does that sound better?

ABSALOM

(Nods). M-m-m.

SOLOMON

You could be much more helpful to me if I removed the cloth from your mouth. It also seems painful. Right?

ABSALOM

(Nods). M-m-m.

Solomon puts a knife to Absalom's throat as if to slash it, and then cuts the gag.

SOLOMON

Does that feel better? Twenty four hours in this position can be a long time.

ABSALOM

Yes, Sir.

SOLOMON

Sheba is quite worried about you. "Absalom has disappeared" her messenger says.

ABSALOM

That is nice to know.

SOLOMON

You seem a bit shaken. Understandable.

ABSALOM

At your service sir.

SOLOMON

Tell. How is Sheba to couch with?

ABSALOM

Need I answer that question, Sir?

SOLOMON

Of course. Have no fear. Sheba and I did our thing years ago.

ABSALOM

She is fine, Sir.

SOLOMON

How often?

Nightly.

ABSALOM

Enjoy it?

SOLOMON

Fine, Sir.

ABSALOM

The truth!

SOLOMON

I've been with better.

ABSALOM

Then why do you do it?

SOLOMON

To be obliging, Sir.

ABSALOM

Solomon puts knife to Absalom's
throat.

The truth. Or this knife may turn red.

SOLOMON

To slash her throat, Sir.

ABSALOM

The truth at last. And your employer?

SOLOMON

The Queen's daughter.

ABSALOM

So both mother and daughter are trying to slash each
other's throats. You have had ample opportunity.
Why have you not done your deed.

SOLOMON

The pay, sir.

ABSALOM

The pay? Insufficient?

SOLOMON

ABSALOM

Quite handsome, in fact. My services to the new Queen of Sheba are quite professional and I demand a high price. She has already paid me a thousand shekels.

SOLOMON

Then why did you not slice my precious Sheba's throat?

ABSALOM

The gold. Sheba left the kingdom with three fourths of the Royal coffers or at least hid it. I would receive 50,000 shekels when I learned where the royal treasure was, and another 20,000 when I slashed her throat.

SOLOMON

Have you no shame?

ABSALOM

No Sir. It's just my profession.

SOLOMON

Honesty, I say. But you speak the truth only with your own instrument at your throat.

ABSALOM

Even without that, sir.

Solomon pushes the knife into Absalom throat and some blood begins to flow out.

SOLOMON

How does that feel?

ABSALOM

I don't like it, Sir.

SOLOMON

Just a slight scratch. Now tell me, nephew, how many of these throats have you slashed in your career? And only 27 years old.

ABSALOM

Thirty-five throats. Sir.

SOLOMON

You should be summarily executed! As were your victims.

ABSALOM

Yes, Sir.

SOLOMON

But perhaps you will not be.

ABSALOM

At your command, Sir.

SOLOMON

It isn't easy being the son of a whore, let alone two of them.

ABSALOM

I managed.

SOLOMON

Both fatherless and motherless. Yet from the Davidic line.

ABSALOM

I survived, Sir.

SOLOMON

Where is the weed you were to bring?

ABSALOM

At Sheba's.

SOLOMON

And the plants?

ABSALOM

They all died. I shall have to go searching for more if permitted, Sir. But if you kill me....

SOLOMON

How convenient. Can you grow more?

ABSALOM

I shall have to begin again.

SOLOMON

I see you have the Davidic decisiveness, cunningness, and brilliance. How old were you when you sliced your first throat?

ABSALOM

Twelve, but only as an apprentice. I became self sufficient at 14. If you're going to kill me, your majesty, please do so quickly.

SOLOMON

I am letting you free.

Solomon cuts the binding ropes.

ABSALOM

You are merciful indeed, Sir.

SOLOMON

And of course you will not kill Sheba.

ABSALOM

Yes Sir. You trust me that much.

SOLOMON

That is correct. But you will not live with Sheba. You have a surprise in store.

ABSALOM

Yes, Sir.

SOLOMON

You will enter the house of my sister Tamar, where you will be cherished.

ABSALOM

Yes, Sir.

SOLOMON

And behave yourself of course. (Beat) How many of those whom you killed were from Israel?

ABSALOM

But six. Abinadab, Hesed, Deker, Shimei, Baana, Geber. Only for hire, Sir.

SOLOMON

All worthy recipients of your services.

ABSALOM

I knew I would not pass the scrutiny of Solomon's agents.

SOLOMON

But you did.

ABSALOM

So how did you uncover me?

SOLOMON

I did not.

ABSALOM

Then who?

SOLOMON

My mother. (Beat) You can fool Solomon. No one fools Bathsheba.

ABSALOM

And she has allowed you to spare my life?

SOLOMON

She even wants to use your services.

ABSALOM

But..

SOLOMON

And she will not. And if you do, Absalom's head comes off.

ABSALOM

I am at last a member of the Royal family. And I certainly will never slash my Aunt Tamar.

SOLOMON

That may pose a problem for my mother. Now leave at once through the West Portico. You will be taken directly to Tamar's major palace. (Rings bell) Out.

ABSALOM

At your service, Sir. My great and glorious king.
(Exits)

SHEBA

(Entering) You asked that I come immediately.

SOLOMON

Let me get to the point quickly.. (Beat) Absalom will be moving out of your palace.

SHEBA

(Shaken)What! Why!

SOLOMON

He will be moving into Tamar's palace.

SHEBA

TAMAR! He does this of his own accord?

SOLOMON

No. Mine. For the protection of the kingdom. Tamar is set on having this statue erected to our brother Absalom, the traitor. If she does, the kingdom will be further weakened. I have two choices. Killing or banishing her. Or give her Absalom. It may placate her.

SHEBA

You are taking my chief bodyguard.

SOLOMON

But you have seven other bodyguards. Why is this one so special?

SHEBA

Because he guards me well.

SOLOMON

I know my dear. But do you want this kingdom to fall? Then where would you go?

SHEBA

I am willing to sacrifice all for my Lord, my loving, wise Solomon.

SOLOMON

My beloved Sheba. I will see you tonight, where you will be my escort. (Rings bell) And have your three missing diamonds turned up?

SHEBA

(Exiting)No, but hopefully we will find them.

SCENE 2 THE TEMPLE NIGHT SEVERAL HOURS LATER

Solomon and Absalom are dressed in beggars' clothing and creeping outside the Temple. A loud blast is heard.

ABSALOM

It's only a falling branch

SOLOMON

We may be being watched by those Levites.

ABSALOM

We will succeed. The lights are still on. A good sign.

The lights from the temple suddenly dim.

SOLOMON

You spoke too soon.

ABSALOM

Surely this is some type of Levite plot. Wouldn't surprise me if ...

Solomon trips and falls

SOLOMON

Ouch! My ankle.

ABSALOM

Shall we go back, Uncle?

SOLOMON

No, we will get to the root of the matter.

The lights become noticeably dimmer.

ABSALOM

I can barely see.

SOLOMON

My son, we proceed. WE will uncover the plot. Let us climb up the stairs.

ABSALOM

As you say.

SOLOMON

In this whole wide world, I can trust but two people. Sheba, a foreigner, and an assassin. Take out one of your candles and light it so that we can see.

Absalom lights candle. A huge glow emanates.

ABSALOM

Our luck has changed. The flame stays on!

Suddenly the candle goes out.

SOLOMON

Solomon's wisdom says that you do not count your eggs until they are hatched. Let us proceed anyhow.

ABSALOM

I plead with you.

SOLOMON

We proceed!

ABSALOM

Let me carry you on my shoulder, your highness.

SOLOMON

Brilliant idea. (Climbing on Absalom's shoulder) We have but forty steps to climb. And your shoulders are broad. There is still some light.

They walk up several stairs and the lights dim even more. Finally the stage is totally dark.

ABSALOM

Have no fear. I can feel my way even in the dark.

They climb up several more stairs when suddenly they fall down the stairs.

SOLOMON

Ouch! Help me . I am in pain.

AUDIENCE

We don't know.

I AM THAT I AM

Shall I tell you?

AUDIENCE

Aye.

I AM THAT I AM

Solomon may someday explain.

SCENE 3 SOLOMON'S CHAMBER

Solomon has several bruises on his body and a gash across his head. Zadok is tied to a chair.

SOLOMON

Would you care for some wine?

ZADOK

As a Levite, I can not drink.

SOLOMON

You must have some of the wine.

ZADOK

I respectfully decline.

SOLOMON

Why are you here?

ZADOK

Only my king can know.

SOLOMON

Are you sure you do not want some wine?

ZADOK

Only if my king insists.

SOLOMON

I will not, Because I am not a murderer. And if you drink this I WILL be a murderer.

ZADOK

Do I hear correctly?

SOLOMON

Yes. The wine which my new Prime Minister gives Solomon to drink. Remove the ropes, Absalom.

Absalom, bruised, enters with a bag and begins removing the ropes.

ZADOK

Eliam! This can not be.

SOLOMON

Then drink the wine.

ZADOK

My King and Lord. I ...

SOLOMON

You had nothing to do with it. The allegiance of my Chief Priest is beyond question.

ZADOK

And where is Eliam?

SOLOMON

Absalom?

Absalom raises the bag but looks away from Zadok.

SOLOMON (cont'd)

In the bag.

ZADOK

Such a small bag.

SOLOMON

Large enough for his head. We must name a new minister.

ZADOK

And in the meantime?

SOLOMON

You will be acting again.

ZADOK

I thank you my Lord.

SOLOMON

But first I must know the truth about the Temple.

ZADOK

I only tell the truth.

SOLOMON

Were you in the Temple when I paid a visit the other night?

ZADOK

No, Sir.

SOLOMON

Neither you nor your priests were there?

ZADOK

No, but..

SOLOMON

How do you know about it then?

ZADOK

There are no secrets in Jerusalem.

SOLOMON

Why is this happening?

ZADOK

I can only surmise.

SOLOMON

I dare not pronounce the word.

ZADOK

Don't.

SOLOMON

And what do you think, Absalom?

ABSALOM

I can only surmise, Sir. The enemies of the king are at work.

SOLOMON

I agree.

ZADOK

Absalom? Why can you never face me? Sometimes I even think you are the embodiment of Satan.

SOLOMON

Absalom you are excused. What a foolish and insulting question!

Absalom exits.

ZADOK

I apologize.

SOLOMON

You will have to apologize to that young man. You consider anyone who opposes you satanic!

ZADOK

Yes, my Lord.

SOLOMON

Your brief incarceration prevented you from viewing your father-in-law's hanging.

ZADOK

I thank you, my king.

SOLOMON

Now go directly and apologize to Absalom.

ZADOK

As said, my Lord.

SCENE 4 TAMAR'S BEDROOM TWO MONTHS LATER

Absalom and Tamar are gazing through the window. A large basket of figs lie on a table. He is scantily dressed in a red robe.

ABSALOM

That meal was the most sumptuous I have ever tasted. Eat one of the figs. Or as many as you like. They are so sweet. I brought them for you.

TAMAR

But I am so full.

Absalom takes a fig and puts it
in his mouth.

ABSALOM

(Speaking with mouth full) The most delicious and
enticing figs I have ever eaten. They could be
addictive.

TAMAR

You have a new outfit tonight? A gift from Sheba?

ABSALOM

No. I bought it for tonight's dinner.

TAMAR

Why?

ABSALOM

You are so good to me.

TAMAR

Absalom. Absalom.

ABSALOM

You are kindness personified. Hold my hand, dear
Tamar.

TAMAR

And I want to be even kinder. Can I bring you
something else to eat?

ABSALOM

No, dear Tamar. Just let me hold your hand.

He pulls her hand.

TAMAR

Oh my brother.

He pulls her even closer.

ABSALOM

My sister. You look even younger than I do.

TAMAR

You jest, my brother.

ABSALOM

I can not control my passions with you, oh Tamar.

TAMAR

Please, my brother. As children, the people said we were the two handsomest children in the kingdom.

ABSALOM

Times have not changed.

TAMAR

But I do not feel comfortable. I have never been the same since Amnon...

ABSALOM

Ah, that was then. This is now.

TAMAR

Please stop. I cannot control my emotions.

ABSALOM

Well you know we have an old Jewish adage that says: The best way to get rid of a temptation is to give into it.

TAMAR

I never heard that adage before.

ABSALOM

Come closer...

TAMAR

But...

ABSALOM

(Pulling)And closer.

Suddenly they begin kissing.

ABSALOM (cont'd)

Tamar.. Do not give in to your passions.

TAMAR

I must stop.

ABSALOM

I must too.

TAMAR

Then stop.

I shall.

ABSALOM

That feels so good.

TAMAR
 Oh my Absalom.

We must stop.

ABSALOM

Oh, yes.

TAMAR

Oh my Tamar.

ABSALOM

No you can not stop. I want you.

TAMAR

But

ABSALOM

She tries to rape him but he pushes her away.

ABSALOM

Oh, my Aunt Tamar.

TAMAR

I have been violated again!

ABSALOM

But no, you tried to violate me.

TAMAR

You violated me!

ABSALOM

No< I did not. There was no violation. You are crazy.

TAMAR

You violated me! I have been violated a second time by my own brother.

ABSALOM

But.

TAMAR

Please leave.

But... ABSALOM

Please leave... TAMAR

My things.. ABSALOM

They will be sent to you. TAMAR

Where do I go? ABSALOM

Return to Sheba. TAMAR

It is night. ABSALOM

Just go. TAMAR

As you will. ABSALOM

Absalom exits. Tamar begins sobbing.

There is no God! TAMAR

SCENE 5 THE NEXT DAY SOLOMON'S CHAMBERS

Solomon is writing. Absalom enters with a bag and a case.

Dear Absalom. SOLOMON

I found another bag of your herbal medicine. . ABSALOM

My beloved Absalom. But you seem much fatigued. SOLOMON

ABSALOM

I slept badly under a tree last night. I have something else for you.

SOLOMON

What is that?

ABSALOM

Please, Sir.

Absalom opens the case, pulls out a knife and proceeds to the throne.

SOLOMON

And so you are going to kill me?

ABSALOM

(Halts and kneels) No, Sir. Not my king. I give this to you.

SOLOMON

Your knife?

ABSALOM

Yes, sir.

SOLOMON

And why are you giving this to me?

ABSALOM

To slash my throat.

SOLOMON

And why can you not slash your own throat?

ABSALOM

I did promise to slice no more throats. I give my life and self to you, kind uncle and king.

SOLOMON

How thoughtful and deferential. But yours is the last throat I thought you would want slashed.

ABSALOM

So did I.

SOLOMON
Why the change?

ABSALOM
Must I, Uncle?

SOLOMON
You must, nephew.

ABSALOM
I am depressed.

SOLOMON
Has inactivity from your previous profession at such a young age affected you? Perhaps you need more throats to slash. I have a list.

ABSALOM
No. I enjoy not having bloody hands. Nor using poisons.

SOLOMON
Why then?

ABSALOM
The Princess Tamar....

SOLOMON
Again.

ABSALOM
No, but...

SOLOMON
Don't tell me..

ABSALOM
Yes.

SOLOMON
A piercing?

ABSALOM
Yes Sir.

SOLOMON
Fear not.

ABSALOM

But your sister, Sir.

SOLOMON

My *troublesome* sister.

ABSALOM

She asked me to her room, and before I knew.

SOLOMON

Have no fear.

ABSALOM

Then may I leave the country.

SOLOMON

You may not.

ABSALOM

The piercing was not my idea.

SOLOMON

You can move back with Sheba. Your belongings will be taken to hers palace.

ABSALOM

Honor and glory to by king. And I want to tell you about a dream I had under the tree. I dreamt that you opened your eyes and saw the temple.

SOLOMON

I see that even the devil has dreams. Please leave by the West Portico.

ABSALOM

I thank you forever, my uncle and King. (Exits)

SOLOMON

(Begins writing) "The heart knows its own bitterness, and its joy" (beat) What shall I say? Ah. That's it. No one else shares.

Tamar enters.

TAMAR

My dearest brother, Solomon. I am hurt.

SOLOMON

What may I do for you, Sister.

TAMAR

I am depressed again.

SOLOMON

Why, beloved sister?

TAMAR

The pain is too great to even repeat. But I have been violated again. By what I thought was the dearest...

SOLOMON

Absalom?

TAMAR

Yes.

SOLOMON

Oh, my dearest Sister. First to be violated by Amnon, had your honor saved by Absalom, and now to be violated again by an evil young man.

TAMAR

I want him brought to trial.

SOLOMON

When.

TAMAR

Immediately.

SOLOMON

You want all this made public.

TAMAR

Yes.

SOLOMON

I shall comply.

TAMAR

Oh, my beloved brother.

SOLOMON

But can you wait a day? An arrest would cause a disturbance, especially before the state final dinner for our ally Hiram.

TAMAR

Of course, my brother. Unless he escapes.

SOLOMON

That will not happen. (Winks) But I ask one other thing. Have you discussed this with anyone else?

TAMAR

No.

SOLOMON

Then tell no one else, until we arrest him.

TAMAR

I shall abide. And good day my brother. (Exits)

SOLOMON

(Begins writing) Let's see:" O garden-dweller, my friends are listening for your voice, let me hear it! Be swift, my lover, like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices!" Perfect, and my love sonnets are complete for Sheba.

SCENE 6, SEVERAL HOURS LATER

Sheba enters.

SOLOMON

So good of you to come so quickly, my Dearest Sheba. And thank you for your last response to my recent request for assistance. So generous.

SHEBA

Anything for my Lord and Protector.

SOLOMON

And I have completed the last of my sonnets written to our love of years ago. (Hands it to her) And I also have something else for you. A painful gift indeed.

SHEBA

I can not even fathom a painful gift from my Lord and
Lover Solomon.

He hands her a box with three
large diamonds. Her face tightens
with anger.

SOLOMON

For you, my Beloved.

SHEBA

My three missing diamonds! Where did you get them!

SOLOMON

We found them with Absalom.

SHEBA

I don't believe it.

SOLOMON

But there is something even more disconcerting.
(Beat) He is a murderer.

SHEBA

A murderer!

SOLOMON

An assassin if you would.

SHEBA

Whom has he assassinated?

SOLOMON

About thirty-five people.

SHEBA

Not Absalom!

SOLOMON

You make me weary, Woman. But my greatest concern is
the next person he may kill.

SHEBA

And who is that.

SOLOMON

You.

SHEBA

Me! For what reason!

SOLOMON

Hired by your daughter. Fifty thousand for the whereabouts of the treasury, and only twenty thousand for your throat. You're not the only one with murder on her mind.

SHEBA

I WILL MURDER HER. But first, I will murder him. By the throat.

SOLOMON

Sheba. Surely not you. And he is much larger.

SHEBA

Not a problem. He won't be the first person I have murdered. But surely he shall die. I will be entertaining him tonight in the most royal of royal banquets.

SOLOMON

Sounds exiting.

SHEBA

I must leave now to supervise the most sumptuous banquet in the history of either Sheba or Israel. The most delicious of meats, fish, and poultry. The fruits and vegetables from my own palace gardens. The figs and dates are the most delectable I have ever tasted. And the wines, the wines will be from my own royal collection. The bottle I have chosen will have been aged for a hundred years. And the conversation will be titillating. And I shall wear my finest dress and most stunning emeralds and diamonds. And of course, my finest perfumes from Arabia.

SOLOMON

Sounds delectable indeed. But you are honoring a man you want to have murdered?

SHEBA

Yes, I will do both. First, I shall serve him the most insidious of all poisons in his wine. One that not even he has heard of. The poison is deadly and unnoticeable, but only weakens the victim at first.

And his throat shall then be slashed with my sharpest and most diamond laden knife as he begins to recoil from this poison.

SOLOMON

Do you wish to have mercy on the man?

SHEBA

What! I am a Sheban and a Hittite. Please don't try to stuff any of your Jewish nonsense about forgiveness down my throat. Now I must hurry home for the preparations. When will the bastard be entering my household?

SOLOMON

He shall be delivered him from Tamar's palace to yours, immediately. Do you need any assistance in disposing of the body.

SHEBA

Of course not. I am totally self sufficient. I thank you for your offer. And the fool does not even know that my daughter would never paid have him his bounty had he succeeded.. She is not a woman of her word, but worse yet, the kingdom is falling apart from lack of funds. When she falls, I shall claim my kingdom back, make my grandson heir, and slash her throat.

SOLOMON

I understand that the current Queen of Sheba bears a remarkable resemblance to the former Queen.

SHEBA

The resemblance ends there. She has her father's brains.

SOLOMON

My dearest Sheba. This must all be very stressful to you.

SHEBA

Fret not. As you are a king, I AM A QUEEN. Adieu. And rest assured. My servants are growing a whole field of the hallucinatory weed.

SOLOMON

Her Majesty misses nothing.

Sheba throws him a kiss and exits.
Solomon rings the bell.

SCENE 7 A DAY LATER

Zadok enters. Solomon is drinking wine.

ZADOK

Your majesty is not in mourning attire. The Queen Mother is dead. Three months is considered an appropriate period of mourning.

SOLOMON

Have you ever known anyone to comeback from the dead from prolonged mourning.

ZADOK

But for..

SOLOMON

Fear not, my public garb will be black. Did I see writing in the Benjamite Quarters saying: "The Adulteress is dead at last"?

ZADOK

They have been punished.

SOLOMON

An act of defiance based on a perception of weakness. Not even God can hold this Kingdom together.

ZADOK

I notice that Milcom, Astarte and the other idols are missing.

SOLOMON

I need the gold. What news do you bring?

ZADOK

Two things. My dream and the Covenant. I dreamt that you were at last able to see the temple, and that when you entered the temple the lights grew more.

SOLOMON

Chief priest, I do not trust dreams and their interpretations even less. And the Covenant?

ZADOK

Now is the time. We are approaching the high holy days.

SOLOMON

Oh yes. The organized histrionics begin again.

ZADOK

Let us rekindle the Covenant. The last and greatest of all the Covenants, following the first with Adam, then Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and then David.

SOLOMON

I count in there murderer, deceiver, adulterer, and drunk. And then my father who may have been all of the above.

ZADOK

And you are without sin?

SOLOMON

Have I not protected the Covenant?

ZADOK

Your father was willing to give his life up for that covenant.

SOLOMON

The so-called other party did not hold up to his agreement, as I watched the cracks of the Empire grow larger.

ZADOK

Think of Job.

SOLOMON

I would rather not. .

ZADOK

God does not expect perfection. Did your foreign gods help?

SOLOMON

At first they were there to humor my wives. Then I learned all those religions told the same story in different formats.

And are you preparing Rehoboam for the Kingship?

ZADOK

To the best of my capability.

SOLOMON

All is understood. When will the kingdom fall?

ZADOK

As long as you are alive..

SOLOMON

I mean after.

ZADOK

The kingdom will fall into two. Two kingdoms, one Judah, the Southern Kingdom for the other eleven tribes. Separate but equal.

SOLOMON

Separate yes, Equal no.

ZADOK

Let us then work at staying alive. You are inhaling a dangerous hallucinatory weed which will kill you. When combined with..

SOLOMON

(Puffing) I sometimes envy you your belief.

ZADOK

The faith of our fathers. I must go now, but I remember when you wrote " Why, I am the most stupid of men, and have not even human intelligence; Neither have I learned wisdom, nor have I the knowledge of the Holy One. Who has gone up to heaven and come down again - who has cupped the wind in his hands? Who has bound up the waters in a cloak, who has marked out all the ends of the earth? What is his name, what is his son's name, if you know it?" Every word of God is tested; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Add nothing to his words, lest he reprove you, and you be exposed as a deceiver.

SOLOMON

The wise young king has now become the wiser older king, and recognizes the folly of myth.

ZADOK

And may I ask show this small group of people muster enough strength to conquer all of the surrounding kingdoms?

SOLOMON

Kingdoms come and go. My Father was a great general.

ZADOK

He was a great general. But that was not enough. There was a greater power. And the Ark of the Covenant?

SOLOMON

The ark of the Covenant? A document created by men for men?

ZADOK

(Interrupting) Then you believe nothing. Faith, faith, faith. Abraham, Isaac, ..

SOLOMON

Delusion, delusion, delusion.

ZADOK

You must fall back on the Lord to do the right thing.

SOLOMON

Doing the right thing is easy. Figuring out what it is the hard thing.

ZADOK

You commit evil when you speak like this. You are doing evil in the eyes of the Lord. MAN SEES THE DEED, BUT GOD SEES THE INTENTION.

SOLOMON

I hear the Chief Priests keep repeating this over and over again. "He does great evil in the eyes of the Lord" All political enemies are given this unctuous castigation.

ZADOK

Please check that sacred scripture that was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

SOLOMON

A set of idiotic rules.

ZADOK

They are sacred. Given to us by God.

SOLOMON

Says who?

ZADOK

Moses. Have you totally excluded God?

SOLOMON

Only because you have included.

ZADOK

I can not deal with a Godless person. I can only pray for you.

SOLOMON

As you wish.

ZADOK

I shall be off. Solomon, Solomon! I held you in my arms the day you were born. Almost a year to the day we buried your brother.

SOLOMON

Life is misery.

ZADOK

A sign of God's will is that we will be led where we did not plan to go.

SOLOMON

Nonsense. Now go.

ZADOK

And do remember that salvation is available to all. Look at our history. And do look out the window.

SOLOMON

Good day.

ZADOK

Your majesty (exits)

Solomon inhales the weed and then
drinks mor wine.

SOLOMON

I too am a mortal man, the same as all the rest, and
a descendant of the first man formed on earth. And in
my mother's womb I was molded into flesh in a ten-
months' period-body and blood, from the seed of man,
and the pleasure that accompanies marriage. And I
too, when born, inhaled the common air, and fell upon
the kindred earth; wailing, I uttered that first
sound common to all. In swaddling clothes and with
constant care I was nurtured. For no king has any
different origin or birth, but one is the entry into
life for all; and in one same way they leave it.

He inhales the weed again and
drinks more wine

SOLOMON (cont'd)

All rivers go to the sea,
Yet never does the sea become full.
To the place where they go,
The rivers keep on going.
All speech is labored;
There is nothing man can say.
The eye is not satisfied with seeing
Nor is the ear filled with hearing.

He inhales weed again and drinks
more wine

SOLOMON

What has been, that will be; what has been done, that
will be done. Nothing is new under the sun. Even the
thing of which we say, "See, this is new!" Has
already existed in the ages that preceded us. There
is no remembrance of the men of old; nor of those to
come will there be any remembrance among those who
come after them.

He inhales the weed again and
drinks more wine.

Fully inebriated and in a stupor, he walks to the window and slowly opens it. Suddenly he exerts a big smile.

SOLOMON

The Temple! The Temple! The Temple! I see the Temple.

He shuts the window and catches his breath.

SOLOMON (cont'd)

And the crowds are not laughing this time. No laughing this time. In fact I heard weeping

He opens the windows again and sees the temple. He jumps in exclamation.

SOLOMON (cont'd)

Praise be to the Lord!

He raises his glass and takes another drink, then almost stumbles to the ground. Rises and lacking breath sits down. He takes another drink.

SOLOMON (cont'd)

I shall now visit the temple.

He tries to ring the attendant's bell, and collapses.

After a short lapse, the I AM THAT I AM is heard.

I AM THAT I AM

Solomon. Solomon

SOLOMON

How eerie indeed.

BATHSHEBA (O.S.)

My son David. The handsomest child in the kingdom, Not so, Oh King David? A future king. Nathaniel thinks he should be named Solomon.

SOLOMON

Even then.

BATHSHEBA (O.S.)

There was never any doubt.

ZADOK (O.S.)

Prince Solomon, the wisest of all children and future King.

BATHSHEBA (O.S.)

Solomon! Solomon! Stay away from Amnon and Absalom. You are the future king. What did Nathaniel and Zadok teach you today. Tomorrow is your twelfth birthday

ZADOK (O.S.)

The violation. Civil war.

BATHSHEBA (O.S.)

Both Amnon and Absalom are now dead.

ZADOK (O.S.)

Prince Solomon, your father King David wishes to see you.

BATHSHEBA (O.S.)

Oh my dying King David, my beloved of all: Will my son be king?

ZADOK (O.S.)

Oh king David, Solomon must be king!

SOLOMON

My father David wishes to build a temple to the honor of the LORD, the God of Israel, but the LORD said to him: "In wishing to build a temple to my honor, you do well. However, you shall not build the temple; rather, your son whom you will beget shall build the temple to my honor." Now the LORD has fulfilled the promise that he made. I have succeeded my father David and have taken my seat on the throne of Israel, as the LORD foretold, and I have built the temple to the honor of the LORD, the God of Israel. And I have placed there the ark, in which abides the covenant of the LORD which he made with the Israelites."

Suddenly Absalom appears.

SOLOMON

I did not expect to see you here so soon.

ABSALOM

It's later than you think.

I AM THAT I AM (O.S.)

You built the temple.

SOLOMON

And I ruled a country.

I AM THAT I AM (O.S.)

You ruled a country.

SOLOMON

I had great public works.

I AM THAT I AM (O.S.)

You had great public works.

SOLOMON

I held together a country.

I AM THAT I AM (O.S.)

You held together a country.

SOLOMON

And the world admired the splendor and wisdom of Solomon.

I AM THAT I AM

And the world admired the splendor and wisdom of Solomon.

ABSALOM

Now, now! Don't be to sure.

SOLOMON

Are you really the son of Absalom.

ABSALOM

Ha! Ha! Ha!

SOLOMON

Were you really the son of the prostitute?

ABSALOM

Ha! Ha! Ha! Perhaps.

SOLOMON
You lied.

ABSALOM
Why your Majesty. I never lie. Ha! Ha! Ha!

SOLOMON
YOU ARE THE DEVIL.

ABSALOM
HA! HA! HA! Now don't get carried away.

I AM THAT I AM
Son of David.

ABSALOM
He is mine.

I AM THAT I AM
Begone! Begone! You shall not have him.

Beat
I AM THAT I AM (cont'd)
My Solomon. My Solomon.

SOLOMON
At last.

I AM THAT I AM
My Solomon. My Solomon.

END OF PLAY