

# THE AGONY OF DAVID

A drama in two acts

By

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## Characters

1. David King of Israel , mid thirties
2. Amnon First Born Son , Teens
3. Absalom Second Born Son, Teens
4. Michal First Wife, mid thirties
5. Tamar Only Daughter , teens
6. Joab Nephew and Chief General, late twenties
7. Nathaniel Prime Minister, mid thirties
8. Bathsheba Favorite wife, late twenties (Tamar)
9. Abishage Favorite Concubine, Teens (Michal)
10. Hushai Friendly counsel. (Nathaniel)
11. Shimei House of Saul. Hates at David (Amnon)
12. Ahithophel Traitorous counsel. (Amnon)
13. Ittai Loyal Friend . (Nathaniel )
14. Soldier

## SCENE 1, QUEEN MICHAL'S RECEIVING ROOM, ABOUT 1020 BCE

Queen Michal, about 40, is sculpting a slab of marble. She hears sounds and rushes to the window. She immediately closes the shutters, bolts the door, and continues sculpting. Knocking ensues and gets louder.

DAVID (O.S.)

Michal! Open the door.

Michal continues sculpting.

DAVID (cont'd)

Open the door. I know you are in.

Michal continues sculpting.

DAVID (cont'd)

My sons Absalom and Amnon are with me.

MICHAL

I did not invite you.

DAVID (O.S.)

I am the King and you are my wife. My visit is a King's prerogative.

MICHAL

One of your eight wives. And thirty concubines. They should be adequate for anyone's needs I do not want to see you!

DAVID (O.S.)

I shall break this door down.

MICHAL

Bring your whole army!

AMNON (O.S.)

Father, we can simply turn the latch.

He turns the latch and the door turns.

David, about 40, Amnon and Absalom, teenagers, enter in military outfits.

DAVID

Disobedience to the King can result in a public hanging.

MICHAL

Be my guest.

DAVID

I have not seen you in three years.

MICHAL

I have no complaints.

DAVID

Will you ever be civil!

MICHAL

To what do I owe the this visit?

DAVID

Have you no respect for the dead! Today is the anniversary of Jonathan and Saul's death. Your own father and brother!

MICHAL

I weep every day for the slaughter of my family. Only a few, survive including the cripple.

DAVID

The cripple indeed! You speak disrespectfully of your own nephew! Jonathan's beloved son Meribbaal and all his family eat at my table every day. I will always take care of the house of Saul. YOUR HOUSE!

MICHAL

Then why did you kill most of us!

DAVID

Now you call me a murderer. I should strangle you with my own bare hands. Now come!

MICHAL

Forcing me to be in your procession! Must you always find ways to humiliate me!

DAVID

And you not I? The night of the return of the Covenant when I ...

MICHAL

Danced naked before young women

DAVID

With God's grace, I celebrated God's return to us!

MICHAL

Naked?

DAVID

I wore loin cloth.

MICHAL

Ha! All was seen. (smiling) And you had grown smaller. .

DAVID

Only your distorted eyes saw smaller! Now you must come with me, my Queen.

MICHAL

Where and why?

DAVID

To visit the grave of your father and Jonathan.

MICHAL

I know my way to their graves.

DAVID

This is the special visit, with the King.

MICHAL

You only want to show that the house of Saul, what is left of it, stands behind you.

DAVID

I go first to visit my friend Jonathan.

AMNON

You loved him, Father.

DAVID

More than my nine brothers and sixteen sons combined.

Amnon and Absalom look uneasily at one another uneasily.

MICHAL

They say a strange love indeed!

DAVID

Not a perverted love, oh bitter queen!

MICHAL

Indeed, he gave you the kingdom! And broke my father's heart.

DAVID

You loved me once.

MICHAL

Indeed. I saved you when King Saul tried to kill...

DAVID

Your love was such.. You lied for me. You loved me then.

MICHAL

Indeed, my king, but...

The sound of footsteps is heard in the background.

DAVID

The Holy Prophet arrives.

MICHAL

Some say he is not so Holy and not so prophetic.

DAVID

Be not disrespectful to God's chosen.

Nathaniel ,thirties enters.

NATHANIEL

Why the delay? The crowds are waiting for the King and the Queen Michal on this day of solidarity.

MICHAL

The King is free to go when he wants.

NATHANIEL

You must aid the King in the divine mission during this drought. The Nation suffers from famine, and revolt may be brewing.

MICHAL

I claim no parts of any divine mission. As for the famine, I and my household observed the fast, even before the enunciation of the Royal edict.

NATHANIEL

We are all part of that mission. The houses of Saul and David must be like one.

MICHAL

I want to see my husband.

NATHANIEL

The king is your husband.

MICHAL

Palti was my husband!

NATHANIEL

The marriage was not valid! You were married to young David when your father broke the sanctity of that marriage by taking you away from your husband of a year and giving you in marriage to another man.

MICHAL

Palti will be my husband until the day I die.

DAVID

You are mine. I killed two hundred Philistines to get you. And to your Father's promise, you are my property. Palti could not kill one Philistine, let alone a hundred. I...

MICHAL

I remember when God's chosen brought the two hundred skeleton heads in a chariot. But now will God's chosen let me visit Palti's grave. You took me from him five years into our marriage. It has been twenty years now.

NATHANIEL

Your husband is David. You have committed grievous sins. To your nation, to your God, and to your husband..

MICHAL

What sins!

NATHANIEL

The destruction of the kingdom. Had you submitted to your husband, the throne would have an heir from both the Judeans and the Benjamites. Both the House of Saul and the House of David would claim the new king, and there would be no potential of civil war after the king's death. And you would someday be queen mother.

Amnon and Absalom glance at one another awkwardly.

MICHAL

I care to be neither a queen mother nor a Queen consort. I only seek one thing.

DAVID

And what is that?

MICHAL

Death!

DAVID

You have the most lavish palaces of any of my wives. You have the highest allowance of any of the Royal Wives. And you want to die!

MICHAL

You have imprisoned me for twenty years. My children do not even know me. I have not even been able to visit my husband's grave. May there forever be a curse upon you.

NATHANIEL

You speak treason! And commit a sacrilege in the eyes of God.

DAVID

The blood of the house of Saul will never be on my hands. Nor the blood of my first wife.

Suddenly Amnon falls.

AMNON

Father, my pain!

DAVID

My son. My son. My first-born. Bring him water. (To Michal) Take back your curse.

AMNON

No, father, I have been sick for a long time.

DAVID

What is it my son?

AMNON

A strange spell that comes upon me. Melancholy and then a fever.

DAVID

My son!

Princess Tamar enters. Amnon seems to revive.



TAMAR

I come unannounced, oh Queen Michal. Forgive me.

MICHAL

Princess Tamar is always welcome in my home. Shall we retire to my very private quarters? I have some things to give you.

DAVID

No one leaves this room until we all visit the graves of Saul and Jonathan.

TAMAR

Why won't you come, dearest Queen Michal?

MICHAL

Because he will not allow me to even see my children.

TAMAR

Says who? They await you, even more now with their father's death. (Turns to David). I beg you, Father, do not deny Queen Michal the right to see her own grown children.

DAVID

We will visit the grave sites first, and then perhaps she may visit her children.

TAMAR

My beloved father! Now will you come my dear Queen Michal.

MICHAL

Come, I shall, but I must see my children. And you must come with me, O Tamar.

AMNON

Sister, shall I escort you.

ABSALOM

Whoa, there. But half sister, oh, Amnon.

DAVID

Must there be constant bickering between my first born and second born. Let us go. Let the house of David, at least, be united. (to Amnon) You seem to be recovered.

AMNON

The sight of my beloved sister always improves my health.

ABSALOM

A perverted love!

DAVID

Stop!

SCENE 2 JONATHAN AND SAUL'S BURIAL GROUND SHORTLY  
AFTERWARDS

Michal, Tamar, Amnon, Absalom, and Nathaniel surround King David who is weeping over the graves of Saul and Jonathan.

NATHANIEL

Weep no more, my King!

DAVID

Alas! The glory of Israel, Saul, slain upon your heights; how can the warriors have fallen! Saul and Jonathan, beloved and cherished, separated neither in life nor in death, swifter than eagles, stronger than lions! Jonathan my brother! Most dear have you been to me; More precious have I held love for you than love for women. How can the warriors have fallen, the weapons of war have perished!

MICHAL

You weep too much, Oh, husband.

NATHANIEL

Certainly a fitting tribute to the late king and Prince Jonathan.

Joab enters the burial ground.

TAMAR

May we now proceed to see Michal's children.

DAVID

Be on your way.

AMNON

May I accommodate them?

MICHAL

We can manage.

ABSALOM

(To Amnon) I thought you were ill? Have your spirits been revived?

Michal, and Tamar speed off.

DAVID

You have arrived late, General Joab?

JOAB

Uncle David, I do not mourn the loss of the house of Saul. He is of the house of Kish, we are from the root of Jesse. We are Judeans, they are Benjamites.

DAVID

(Interrupting) This is the grave of my brother Jonathan. We swore allegiance once.

JOAB

Once. You have fed his crippled son and all of his offspring for a decade. Is that not sufficient? But I have more news to report. The Gibeonite revenge continues.

DAVID

They can be quelled easily enough.

NATHANIEL

But not the Gibeonite curse. There is blood guilt on Saul and his family because he put the Gibeonites to death.

DAVID

Surely..

NATHANIEL

It is real. The cause of the famine is the Gibeonite curse.

DAVID

Superstition!

NATHANIEL

Joab is right. God spoke to me in a dream and told me that the cause of our three year famine was the Gibeonite curse. I called upon the Gibeonites and asked them what we must we to make atonement, that they may bless the inheritance of the LORD? They said that King Saul exterminated half their population and asked that seven men from among his descendants be given to them.

DAVID

For what reason?

NATHANIEL

That they may dismember them on the LORD'S mountain.

DAVID

I cannot bear the thought..

NATHANIEL

And do you want more famine! There will be more starvation. If this famine continues another month there will be a civil war. The House of David will be no more, and you will lose favor with God. You will fail in providing a kingdom for God's people.

DAVID

Surely, the people hold me responsible for the famine?

JOAB

What for, Oh, Uncle?

DAVID

For my sin with Bathsheba and the murder of the Hittite.

NATHANIEL

You have atoned and your first child died.. No, the house of Saul is to blame.

DAVID

But the slaughter of the Amakelites was God's will. Saul only killed half of them and spared their king. In so doing, he incurred God's wrath. It was Samuel, following God's orders who said to their king, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." Then he cut the king down before the LORD in Gilgal.

NATHANIEL

Not even you can question God's will. We can understand God's will, but not his way.

DAVID

Let me consider.

JOAB

When the civil war begins, Saul's surviving descendants will take over the throne. And that venomous Michal will jump with glee. I am ready to pick up and deliver the seven men. Which ones do you choose?

DAVID

None from Jonathan's line. Take Armoni and Meribani, the two sons Rizpah bore to Saul, and the five sons of Saul's daughter Merob, my first love.

JOAB

We shall proceed immediately.

ABSALOM

Look, Father, the sun has disappeared and there are clouds in the sky.

DAVID

(Turning to the grave) Jonathan! Jonathan.! I do this to follow the will of God. But my love and oath to you will never cease.

SCENE 3 AMNON'S ROOM SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Amnon is lying asleep in bed. David is holding his hand.

DAVID

Do not die on your father.

AMNON

I will get better.

DAVID

The pain?

AMNON

Agonizing.

DAVID

But you will get better.

AMNON

The rains have not come.

DAVID

They have come!

AMNON

When?

DAVID

When we turned over Saul's seven descendants, The Gibeonites dismembered them on the mountain before the LORD. The seven fell at the one time, they were put to death shortly after. Afterwards Saul's concubine took sackcloth and prostrated herself on the rock. The rains then fell. And now this is our third day of rain. But these descendants of Saul were honorable men. I buried them with Saul, Jonathan, and buried them together in the tomb of Kish.

AMNON

Oh father. I was well, and then I looked out of the window.  
I saw the seven hanging bodies...

A look of terror comes over Amnon's  
face.

DAVID

What is that look of terror on your face?

AMNON

The curse came upon me when ...

DAVID

You must not believe such fish tales.

AMNON

You have much sadness in your life, father.

DAVID

But your illness causes me the most sadness. Someday you  
will be king. What can I do to make you better?

AMNON

My spirits would be lifted with a visit from my sister.

DAVID

She is on her way. After much coaxing , she agreed to come.

AMNON

I am already better.

DAVID

And she is bringing her cakes with her. I must meet my  
troops. Please rest.

David hurriedly exits. Amnon returns  
to sleep. A second later Tamar enters  
dressed in white carrying a basket of  
breads.

TAMAR

My brother, thou art ill indeed. Rest, sweet brother. I  
will return.

AMNON

Remain, sister.

TAMAR

I see some color coming to your face.

AMNON

My sister's visit always makes me feel better. May I have one?

She brings the basket to him. He takes it.

TAMAR

They are quite good today.

AMNON

Can you hold my hand.

TAMAR

Why yes, brother.

AMNON

This makes me feel better so much better.

TAMAR

Let me get you another cake.

AMNON

Hold my hand some more.

TAMAR

I must put the cover on the cakes.

AMNON

(Pull her hand closer) No. Stay here. I want your hand.

TAMAR

Let go.

AMNON

No. Come closer.

TAMAR

Let go. You are my brother.

AMNON

Come! Lie with me, my sister!

He gets up from the bed and overpowers her,

TAMAR

No my brother! Do not shame me! That is an intolerable crime. Do not commit this insensate deed. Where will I take my shame? And you will be a discredited man.

AMNON

You are mine!

TAMAR

Let go of me!

AMNON

I can not control myself.

TAMAR

For our Father's sake, let go of me!

AMNON

I am cursed.

TAMAR

Let me go.

AMNON

I can not. I must have you.

TAMAR

No. Help! Help! Help!

AMNON

I won't harm you. Just this once..

TAMAR

Get off me.

AMNON

I must have you.

TAMAR

Help! Help!

Amnon overpowers and rapes Tamar.

TAMAR (cont'd)

Oh, God! Oh, God. I am destroyed. A virgin no more.

AMNON

No one else need know.



TAMAR

No one else need know! All of Israel shall know. You are unfit to be king.

AMNON

Get up and leave.

TAMAR

No, Brother, because to drive me out would be far worse than the first injury you have done me.

AMNON

Say nothing and no one will know about it. And you know the act was consensual

TAMAR

CONSENSUAL!!

AMNON

You enjoyed it.

TAMAR

I am violated! Destroyed for life.

AMNON

(Calling out to servants) Would one of the servants please escort this woman out.

TAMAR

Do not further humiliate me!

AMNON

Away from me, you whore!

TAMAR

Can I believe this is Amnon!

AMNON

(Shouting to the servants) Bar the door after her.

TAMAR

I will leave on my own accord. You have no mercy!

AMNON

It was YOU who submitted.

TAMAR

I did not!

AMNON

Out.

TAMAR

May you forever be cursed.

AMNON

Leave!

Tamar goes outside weeping , closing  
the door behind her. Absalom rushes up  
from the side portico.

ABSALOM

My Sister, neighbors heard the screams and sent messengers.  
What were you doing in Amnon's quarters?

TAMAR

Our father sent me to ...

ABSALOM

And what happened?

TAMAR

Nothing.

ABSALOM

Nothing! The screams! Blood on your tunic?

TAMAR

The blood of the Virgin.

ABSALOM

He violated you!

TAMAR

I am confused!

ABSALOM

He pierced you!

TAMAR

I tried to stop him. But...

ABSALOM

Our father...

TAMAR

Won't do anything. (Begins weeping) Besides, what can he do!  
I am no longer a virgin. The deed is done.

ABSALOM

Amnon must hang. Come, we must go to our father. If he is  
God's chosen, he will hang that pervert.

TAMAR

Absalom! All I have is you.

They embrace.

DARK

David , Joab, and Nathaniel, holding a  
contract, are standing near a window

DAVID

He is to be kept in confinement for 400 days. You will assign  
four soldiers to carry him from one shrine to the other.

JOAB

Shrines are mostly in the desert!

DAVID

Exactly! He is to visit one shrine each day, kneel for two  
hours, and ask God's forgiveness.

JOAB

And what provisions?

DAVID

Bread and water in the morning and bread and water at night.

JOAB

A future king?

DAVID

You must proceed quickly. Absalom may wish to kill him.

Joab exits. Nathaniel opens the  
contract.

NATHANIEL

The groom's parents will provide a handsome dowry. And the  
mother is from the House of Kish. They are aware she is a  
violated woman.

DAVID  
News spreads fast. Perhaps it did not happen at all....

NATHANIEL  
Please....

DAVID  
You have done your work.

NATHANIEL  
And the succession?

DAVID  
This is not the time to ..

NATHANIEL  
Yes, My Lord.

DAVID  
Please send Bathsheba to me.

Loud knocking is heard. The door opens  
and Absalom and Tamar enter. Nathaniel  
exits.

DAVID  
My beloved daughter.

TAMAR  
You already know?

ABSALOM  
Our sister and daughter is destroyed by the hand of her own  
brother.

DAVID  
But all is not lost.

ABSALOM  
All is not lost!

DAVID  
I have a marriage contract.

ABSALOM  
Our father acts quickly.

DAVID  
For my children I will do anything.

ABSALOM

Perhaps you should hang your son. Were he not the king's son he would have already been executed.

TAMAR

I am a destroyed woman. My life will never be the same.

DAVID

That need not be.

ABSALOM

What do you intend to do about the dastardly deed?

DAVID

He will do penance for 400 days. He will only eat bread and water each day.

ABSALOM

Is that all!

DAVID

We can not do what is done. But I already have a marriage contract in hand. The son of Johanidim of the house of Kish has agreed to marry you and his wealthy family has provided a large dowry...

ABSALOM

Within moments of his only daughter's ...

TAMAR

I do not want to marry that bore.

DAVID

He is a fine and prominent young man. I am trying to save you above all.

TAMAR

You forced me to visit my brother.

DAVID

I erred...

TAMAR

And now you force me into an undesirable marriage moments after I have been violated.

ABSALOM

A hanging is in order and you instead find ways to save a man who, were he not the Kings son, would surely be hung.

TAMAR

Hang me instead. I want to die.

DAVID

A sinner yes. But he is still the first-born. And had you remained quiet..

TAMAR

And now you hold me to blame.

DAVID

I love you, Daughter.

ABSALOM

Love! No decent father would allow a daughter to be raped and then allow the rapist to go free.

DAVID

And what is your interest in the matter? With Amnon out of the way you would king.

ABSALOM

My sister's honor is above any personal ambition.

DAVID

Why is it that only blood will satisfy you!

ABSALOM

Let the Amnon, son of the slave woman, be king! But from this day onward, may you bow your head in shame at the sight of my destroyed sister and your daughter.

DAVID

I want only to preserve my family.

ABSALOM

Is God's chosen so perverted that he allows the worst abomination to go unpunished. You have brought dishonor to the House of Jesse.

DAVID

I love you, Son!

ABSALOM

Then love your daughter as well!

DAVID

There is nothing more I can do. (Turning to Tamar) For your own happiness, for the sake of the House of Jesse, for your father, and for the Kingdom, please accept the marriage proposition.

TAMAR

I will sleep with no man again!

DAVID

Please, Daughter!

TAMAR

Even if I am dragged in chains to my marriage ceremony.

DAVID

Tamar, please!

TAMAR

Hang me instead of my evil half-brother.

DAVID

Forgive Amnon!

ABSALOM

From this day on, I will no longer call you father.

TAMAR

No my brother. He is still our father. But please, let me spend all of my days alone, oh, father.

DAVID

Do consider!

TAMAR

I will die first!

ABSALOM

Let us leave. We have no father.

Tamar and Absalom exit. David kneels.

DAVID

In you, LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your justice deliver me; incline your ear to me; make haste to rescue me! Be my rock of refuge, a stronghold to save me. You are my rock and my fortress. For your name's sake lead and guide me. Into your hands I commend my spirit; you will redeem me, LORD, faithful God.

Be gracious to me, LORD, for I am in distress;with grief my eyes are wasted,my soul and body spent. (psalm 31)

Bathsheba enters and embraces David.

BATHSHEBA

My King and Lord.

DAVID

What would I do without you?

BATHSHEBA

I arrived early and could not help but overhear. My dearest husband. What an ungrateful lot!

DAVID

Am I doing right?

BATHSHEBA

Why of course. Amnon is being punished. You have made appropriate wedding arrangements for poor Tamar who has been violated. Oh, I feel her sorrow and pain. But what more can be done?

DAVID

They want a hanging.

BATHSHEBA

NO more bloodshed, my king.

DAVID

I have only you and God by my side.

BATHSHEBA

Little Solomon sends poem he wrote for you. He has his father's gift of writing.

DAVID

Let us read it together within our own quarters.

BATHSHEBA

As you say my Lord.

SCENE 4 THE DESERT SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

Amnon is kneeling and weeping before a shrine.



AMNON

Happy the sinner whose fault is removed, whose sin is forgiven. Happy those to whom the LORD imputes no guilt, in whose spirit is no deceit.

Joab enters unnoticed.

AMNON (cont'd)

As long as I kept silent, my bones wasted away; I groaned all the day. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength withered as in dry summer heat. Then I declared my sin to you; my guilt I did not hide. I said, "I confess my faults to the LORD," and you took away the guilt of my sin. You are my shelter; from distress you keep me; with safety you ring me round. (Psalm 32)

Amnon prostrates himself.

JOAB

Cousin, You have become a man of God, like your father.

AMNON

I am unworthy but God has found me.

JOAB

And the rape of your sister?

AMNON

I shall spend the rest of my days in penance.

JOAB

We learned that your brother Absalom is riding toward this shrine..

AMNON

I have no fear. A sinner I am, but now I am a different man. God has spoken to me through revelation.

Suddenly Absalom enters carrying a large basket of food and wine. Joab pulls out his sword.

ABSALOM

My brother!

JOAB

Stop or I shall strike you dead.

ABSALOM

I am a man of peace.

JOAB

Disarm.

ABSALOM

I have only my sword. Here. Take it. (Throws it to Joab)  
And some wheat cakes, cheese, wine, and figs for my starving  
brother.

AMNON

I love you, brother Absalom.

ABSALOM

And I love you, oh, future king.

AMNON

I see a new light. I have had God's calling.

ABSALOM

We are both sons of David.

AMNON

And Tamar? Whom I have destroyed!

ABSALOM

She is fine.

JOAB

I was not aware of this.

AMNON

I shall spend the rest of my life in restitution.

ABSALOM

All is forgiven. It was the curse of the House of Kish

JOAB

You are also violating your father's orders by breaking  
Amnon's penitential fast

ABSALOM

My father is sometimes too harsh.

AMNON

Even though I fell under the yoke of the curse, in the end, I  
was responsible for the dastardly deed. Your forgiveness is  
God's answer to me.

ABSALOM

Let us pray that stanza from our Father's Psalm.

## ABSALOM AND AMNON

Have mercy on us, God, in your goodness; in your abundant compassion blot out my offense. Wash away all my guilt; from my sin cleanse me. For I know my offense; my sin is always before me.

## JOAB

You can see your brother again when the penance period is over in about forty days.

## ABSALOM

Your order is my command.

## AMNON

Until we see one another again, brother.

## ABSALOM

I shall prepare a great feast to celebrate your return.

## AMNON

A simple meal will do.

## ABSALOM

My brother deserves the best.

SCENE 5 SEVERAL MONTHS LATER, ABSALOM'S DINING ROOM

Joab, Nathaniel and Michal standing around a banquet table graced with flowers.

## MICHAL

The smell of the roast lamb! Prince Absalom has certainly prepared a fine feast.

## JOAB

Fine food indeed. And where is the honored guest?

## MICHAL

Prince Amnon must be tired. He only returned this morning.

## JOAB

And why is the King not here?

## NATHANIEL

He could not leave his visitor King Hiram, our friend.

Amnon, carrying a large gold gift, enters.

AMNON

Greetings to all in God's name.

NATHANIEL

You look so thin and tired, young prince.

JOAB

My cousin has lived on bread and water for 300 days.

MICHAL

(Raising her glass) To Amnon's health.

AMNON

I have never felt so well before.

Absalom, wearing his royal robes and  
very well groomed enters.

ABSALOM

My dearest brother, you have returned.

AMNON

And you, oh Brother, prepared this feast for my return.

ABSALOM

I have 14 other brothers, but there is only one Amnon.  
Remember when we played as children.. We have much to talk  
about. Perhaps our other guests will go and have some of  
my newest and best wine in the courtyard before dinner.

JOAB

Gladly.

MICHAL

You make the best of wines.

NATHANIEL

I shall have to bring some to your father.

ABSALOM

I have sent provisions to your home.

AMNON

You are too kind brother.

ABSALOM

We shall have dinner in a moment. But first we have  
another guest.

Who might that may?  
 AMNON

Tamar.  
 ABSALOM

Amnon flinches in surprise.

Tamar!  
 AMNON

Tamar. You don't want to see her? Our only sister?  
 ABSALOM

Yes. But not now.  
 AMNON

Why, Oh Brother. If God has forgiven you...  
 ABSALOM

But now? Not on this night.  
 AMNON

Would it be fair to hold a feast and not invite Tamar?  
 ABSALOM

I will want to see her in due time.  
 AMNON

With forgiveness the shame is gone.  
 ABSALOM

No shame. Only discomfort. For while I...  
 AMNON

Nonsense. (shouting out) Come in Tamar.  
 ABSALOM

Tamar, withered, heavy, and disheveled,  
 enters. She is still wearing the gown  
 and tunic she wore when raped. She  
 carries a plate of the breads, like  
 the ones she had prepared for Amnon.  
 Amnon looks in the other direction

Our brother has returned. What joy, oh sister.  
 ABSALOM (cont'd)

Amnon. Brother. TAMAR

Amnon turns in the other direction.

Why do you turn, Amnon. ABSALOM

Yes, Amnon. TAMAR

Come sister, let us embrace our brother. ABSALOM

Absalom and Tamar walk towards Amnon.

You look so tired, sister. AMNON

I am better now. TAMAR

I am so pleased to see you, sister. AMNON

And we too. Now my brother, here is a gift to you. ABSALOM

Absalom pulls out a knife and stabs Amnon five times. Amnon stumbles to the ground and dies. The guests scream. Everyone except Joab flees. David runs to Amnon.

My son! My son! DAVID (cont'd)

I will die shortly father. AMNON

Who stabbed you? DAVID

My dear brother Absalom. AMNON

Don't die! DAVID

AMNON

All is forgiven.

DAVID

Live! God, Intercede!

JOAB

My Uncle!

DAVID

Amnon is not dead! Please tell me he is not dead!

JOAB

He is dead!

DAVID

Find Absalom immediately!

JOAB

As you say!

DAVID

Do not reprove me in your anger, LORD, nor punish me in your wrath. Have pity on me, LORD, for I am weak; heal me, LORD, for my bones are trembling. In utter terror is my soul-- and you, LORD, how long..Turn, LORD, save my life; in your mercy rescue me. I am wearied with sighing; all night long tears drench my bed; my couch is soaked with weeping. (Psalm 6)

SCENE 6 MICHAL'S HOME, SHORTLY AFTERWARDS

Michal hears knocking.

MICHAL

Who is it?

JOAB (O.S.)

The king's chief arm-bearer.

MICHAL

What do you want, Joab?

JOAB

Is Absalom with you?

MICHAL

You think I would harbor murderers?

Well... JOAB

Check for yourself! MICHAL

Joab enters.

Your husband is in distress. JOAB

What can I do for you? MICHAL

Where is Absalom? JOAB

How am I to know? MICHAL

Tamar is also missing. JOAB

These are not MY children. MICHAL

They were last seen in this vicinity. JOAB

Search the entire house then. MICHAL

Not necessary. JOAB

Why? MICHAL

Because I trust you. May I call you Aunt Michal. JOAB

You may not. Now either search this house or get out. MICHAL

I shall leave then. JOAB

And no search? MICHAL



JOAB  
And If I find Absalom?

MICHAL  
Bring him to the king.

JOAB  
Send a messenger if he turns up. (Exits)

Absalom enter from side door.

ABSALOM  
Does Joab really want to capture me?

MICHAL  
Joab knows what your father.

Tamar enters quietly.

ABSALOM  
Where shall I go now?

MICHAL  
To Geshur! Flee immediately. And then do what you have to do to claim the kingdom that is yours.

ABSALOM  
What do you mean?

MICHAL  
Overthrow your father and claim what is yours!

ABSALOM  
The kingdom is ALREADY mine.

MICHAL  
You will never be able claim the kingdom!

ABSALOM  
Simply because I killed a pervert?

MICHAL  
Because YOU will be killed.

ABSALOM  
By my father?

MICHAL  
By that woman.

Who?  
 ABSALOM

Bathsheba!  
 MICHAL

Bathsheba?  
 ABSALOM

Amnon is now dead. You stand in the way.  
 MICHAL

Queen Michal knows best.  
 TAMAR

I am the rightful heir.  
 ABSALOM

That is irrelevant. The forces that count, Nathaniel, the Hittite whore, and others surrounding your father want Solomon. Yes, that 8 year old result of an illicit union!  
 TAMAR

How!  
 ABSALOM

Not how, but why! The Hittite woman gets what she wants and she wants her oldest son on the throne. She gets what she wants in the vertical position, and when that fails, she tries the horizontal position. You are now the King's first son and the grandson of the King of Geshur. I am the daughter of Israel's first king and your father's first wife. To no avail. The Hittite woman will have her way. But first she must get rid of you.  
 MICHAL

Bathsheba!  
 ABSALOM

As she had Amnon killed.  
 MICHAL

Amnon died at my hands.  
 ABSALOM

Orchestrated by Bathsheba.  
 MICHAL

How!  
 ABSALOM

MICHAL

You remember Jonadab.

ABSALOM

My cousin? Amnon's friend.

MICHAL

I understand he goaded Amnon to rape Tamar. And it was he who reported Amnon's murder to your father. I am convinced she put him up to it. You fell into her plan too. Her intent was to cause strife between two brothers, and then claim the throne for Solomon. She stops at nothing!

ABSALOM

She has always been pleasant?

MICHAL

How did she become Queen!

ABSALOM

She married my father.

MICHAL

But how!

ABSALOM

Rumor has it that he saw her naked as she was bathing

MICHAL

She knew that she was well in view of the King when she bathed.

ABSALOM

But...

MICHAL

The rest is all history. Here she is, a foreigner, a Hittite, the wife of his trusted arm-bearer. She is now the favored Queen. And only HER son will be on the throne. You even hear the Chief Priest, Nathaniel, and the military already talking about it.

ABSALOM

I have heard nothing.

MICHAL

All the doting about the brilliance about little Solomon's brilliance? Wise up. You must harden if you are to become king. Your days are numbered.

ABSALOM

But I am the oldest. And my brother, Adonijah, is next in line should I die.

MICHAL

Irrelevant! That senseless one is already doomed. The noose is already for his head.

ABSALOM

But my Father..

MICHAL

Who knows what he will do! The throne is rightfully yours. And there is but one way to do it. Seize it!

ABSALOM

Lead a rebellion! Against my own father!

MICHAL

Is he setting the throne aside for you!

ABSALOM

What do I do?

MICHAL

Need I tell you how!

ABSALOM

By taking advantage of seething anger and underlying resentment against the King?

MICHAL

And!!

ABSALOM

Falling back on your tribe, the House of Benjamin...my Strongest supporters.

MICHAL

Now you speak like King Absalom!

ABSALOM

But how am I to know that your own relatives will not seize the throne. After all....

MICHAL

THEY ARE YOUR STRONGEST SUPPORTERS!

ABSALOM

But only to defeat my father. As the Ammonites say, "Mine enemies enemy is my friend. And afterwards?"

MICHAL

You are their only hope.

ABSALOM

I take your advice, oh Michal.

MICHAL

You will find the strength! Was it not you who slipped the knife into your evil brothers body? If you succeed the kingdom is yours. If you fail, your fate is no different than had you not tried.

ABSALOM

I will be grateful to you forever. And yet I love my father. And I believe you did once too.

MICHAL

More than anyone has ever loved before. Perhaps more than my brother Jonathan's love for him. And I was willing to die for him when the King tried to kill him.

ABSALOM

Do you love him now.

MICHAL

As much as I hate him.

## Act 2

## SCENE 1 ABSALOM'S HOME, A YEAR LATER

Absalom is seated when Joab, soot all over his body, rushes into the room

ABSALOM

I was expecting you.

JOAB

Your servants set my field on fire?

ABSALOM

Thank you for coming.

JOAB

So you burn my barley field!!!

ABSALOM

I thought you might enjoy the light.

JOAB

Are you insane! What do you want!

ABSALOM

Why did I come back from Geshur?

JOAB

You begged to see your father.

ABSALOM

But I have not seen my father.

JOAB

Can you blame him? You murdered his son ! He relented and allowed your return to Israel with the stipulation that he never see you again.

ABSALOM

I took the life of an incestuous rapist. Now, I want to see my father. If I am guilty, let him put me to death.

JOAB

You have the devil in you.

ABSALOM

I want to see my father.

DARK

David is kneeling in prayer.

DAVID

Happy those concerned for the lowly and poor when misfortune strikes, the LORD delivers us LORD, have mercy on me, heal me. Have I have sinned against you. My enemies ask when will David die and be forgotten?' When people visit me, they speak without sincerity. Their hearts store up malice; They leave and spread their vicious lies. Psalm 41

Joab enters carrying a small cloth case, unnoticed by David.

JOAB

The Nation awaits for the mourning to end.

DAVID

My official mourning is over. Only in the privacy of my...

JOAB

The two are one and the same. Now...

DAVID

Soot all over your body?

JOAB

My field was set on fire.

DAVID

Who would dare do such a dastardly thing.

JOAB

Absalom.

DAVID

Has the disgraced one gone insane.

JOAB

Shall I send my men out to kill him?

DAVID

Not now.

JOAB

A fathers heart ...

DAVID

A father's sore heart.

JOAB

Then shall I bring him to you?

DAVID

I do not wish to see him.

JOAB

Then I must send my troops to capture him and bring him in for the justice...

DAVID

Can I see a third child destroyed.

JOAB

Then what is the solution, Uncle. He will become more destructive without a response.

DAVID

Tell him that he may re-enter Jerusalem. But make sure he understands that he will not be welcome at court.

JOAB

As you say, Lord. I will keep him out of your presence.

DAVID

And Tamar?

JOAB

She is not well.

DAVID

Bring her to me.

JOAB

I will have to drag her in chains.

DAVID

Has she lost her mind.

JOAB

I believe so.

DAVID

Then I shall visit her.

JOAB

That you can not do. She is still troubled.



DAVID

No one is more troubled than I.

JOAB

She has sent this response to you in anticipation of your request to see her.

DAVID

Show me.

Joab pulls out the blood stained tunic.

JOAB

I wanted to spare you the pain.

DAVID

Pain? No I have anger. Does this woman ever do anything but indulge in self pity.

JOAB

No, it was your sons who committed the crimes.

DAVID

Can she not forgive. So as my Father in heaven has forgiven me, so I am willing to forgive my children regardless of the misdeeds.

JOAB

Is this the same David of who the women of Israel once said "Saul kills hundreds. David kills thousands"

DAVID

But not loved ones. I killed only the enemy.

JOAB

Sometimes the enemy is within our own family.

DAVID

Tell my son that he can live in the Royal City, but that he will not be allowed in my presence.

JOAB

Will do as told

DAVID

And if that murderer appears in my presence, I will have both a second dead son and a dead nephew.

JOAB

You would kill your nephew?

DAVID

Why you are my strongest soldier. But...

JOAB

But what?

DAVID

You yourself know what you, son of Zeruah, did to me when you slew the two generals of Israel's armies, Abner, son of Ner, and Amasa, son of Jether. You took revenge for the blood of war in a time of peace, and put bloodshed without provocation on the belt about my waist and the sandal on my foot

JOAB

I did it for Israel.

DAVID

I am Israel.

SCENE 2 A YEAR LATER

Absalom stands by the gate. Two strangers approach him.

STRANGER 1

Aren't you the King's son.

ABSALOM

Stranger, I am, kind man. But I am here to be your servant.

STRANGER 2

You rise early.

ABSALOM

Only to serve my father's subjects.

STRANGER 2

You are a prince indeed, and someday king. I see you have the finest chariots and horses in the kingdom.

ABSALOM

Only to better serve my father.

STRANGER 1

We understand you are the core of your father's eye. He has forgiven you and now you dine with him weekly.

ABSALOM

That is correct. He was once angry with me for the murder of the rogue Amnon, but now we are at peace since I did not commit a crime. Amnon had to die for the destruction of my sister.

STRANGER 1

He deserved to die. Then can you do us a favor.

ABSALOM

I will do what I can.

STRANGER 2

My brother claims our inheritance.

ABSALOM

Who is he?

STRANGER 2

A close friend of your father.

ABSALOM

From what city are you?

STRANGER 1

Your servants are from the tribe of Dan.

ABSALOM

I shall personally help you. Are you suing?

STRANGER 1

I am.

ABSALOM

Your suit is good and just, but there is no one to hear you in the king's name. If only I could be appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a lawsuit to be decided might come to me and I would render him justice. But come to see me in the morning. I will do whatever I can. I must be on my way.

STRANGER 1

Blessed be Absalom in the name of the Lord.

STRANGER 2

Amen.

ABSALOM

Support me and a new day will come

STRANGER 2

We support you.

STRANGER 1

Totally.

He exits. The strangers remove their cloaks and we see that they are Joab and Nathaniel

JOAB

Our disguise worked. Is this a full scale rebellion, Nathaniel?

NATHANIEL

What else?

DARK

David is seated, with Joab and Nathaniel facing him.

JOAB

The Israelites have transferred their loyalty to Absalom. Why did you allow him back into the court?

DAVID

You are a father too.

NATHANIEL

And why did you allow him to go out of the country again?

DAVID

He asked me several months ago. "Allow me to go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to the LORD."

JOAB

Why?

DAVID

He said: "For while living in Geshur in Aram, your servant made this vow: 'If the LORD ever brings me back to Jerusalem, I will worship him in Hebron.'"

JOAB

While in Geshur, Absalom sent spies throughout the tribes of Israel to say, "When you hear the sound of the horn, declare Absalom king in Hebron."

DAVID

Surely you jest, my nephew!

JOAB

Two hundred men had accompanied Absalom from Jerusalem. They have been invited and went in good faith, knowing nothing of the plan.

DAVID

Stop!

JOAB

Absalom has also sent our counselor Ahithophel the Gilonite, an invitation to come from his town, Giloh, for the sacrifices he is about to offer. The conspiracy is gaining strength, and the people with Absalom are increasing by the day.

NATHANIEL

You must flee.

DAVID

No!

JOAB

For your life. Up! Let us take flight, or none of us will escape from Absalom. Leave quickly, lest he hurry and overtake us, then visit disaster upon us and put the city to the sword.

DAVID

We need preparation.

JOAB

Your servants are ready, whatever our lord the king chooses to do.

DAVID

Then let us set out, accompanied by our entire household, except for ten concubines to take care of the palace.

JOAB

I go, but reluctantly.

Ittai, sevens, enters and falls prostrate before David.

ITTAI

My king, my king. I am coming with you!

DAVID

Why!? Return and take your brothers with you, and may the LORD be kind and faithful to you.

ITTAI

As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, your servant shall be wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life.

JOAB

Obey the king.

ITTAI

I, Ittai the Gittite, with all my men and all my dependents shall march with the king.

DAVID

Ittai, Ittai, my friend!

ITTAI

Everyone in the countryside weeps and they will weep aloud as your soldiers go by,

DAVID

We shall cross over to Kidron Valley on ahead of him by way of the Mount of Olives, toward the desert.

Nathaniel approaches with the Ark of the Covenant

NATHANIEL

We bring you the Ark of the Covenant.

DAVID

Take the Ark of God back to the city. If I find favor with the LORD, he will bring me back and permit me to see it and its lodging.

NATHANIEL

I too with all the Levite bearers of the ark of the covenant of God, and Abiathar will bring the ark of God to a halt until the soldiers march out of the city.

DAVID

But if he should say, 'I am not pleased with you,' I am ready; let him do to me as he sees fit.

NATHANIEL

Yes, oh king.

DAVID

See to it that you return to the city in peace. I shall be waiting at the fords near the desert until I receive information from you.

NATHANIEL

We shall take the ark of God back to Jerusalem and remain there.

DAVID

Now go.

JOAB

Athiopel is an infidel.

DAVID

Why do you say that?

JOAB

Ahithophel was among the conspirators with Absalom.

DAVID

O LORD, turn the counsel of Ahithophel to folly!

Hushai rushes in

HUSHAI

I am here your lord.

DAVID

Hushai the Archite you are with rent garments and dirt upon your head.

HUSHAI

I come with you ,My Lord

DAVID

If you come with me, you will be a burden to me. But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, 'Let me be your servant, O king; I was formerly your father's servant, but now I will be yours,' you will undo for me the counsel of Ahithophel.

HUSHAI

Why Yes my Lord.

DAVID

If you hear anything from the royal palace, you shall report it to the priests or Nathaniel. You shall send on to me whatever you hear.

HUSHAI  
I am honored my Lord. Exits.

Suddenly Shimei, late sixties appears  
and attacks the king but is repelled by  
Joab who grabs his knife.

JOAB  
Shall we kill him.

DAVID  
It is Shimei, the relative of my wife Michal.

JOAB  
He deserves to die.

SHIMEI  
Away, away, you murderous and wicked man! The LORD has  
requited you for all the bloodshed in the family of Saul, in  
whose stead you became king, and the LORD has given over the  
kingdom to your son Absalom. And now you suffer ruin because  
you are a murderer

JOAB  
Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go  
over, please, and lop off his head.

DAVID  
What business is it of mine or of yours, son of Zeruah, that  
he curses? Suppose the LORD has told him to curse David; who  
then will dare to say, 'Why are you doing this?'

JOAB  
Uncle!

DAVID  
If my own son, who came forth from my loins, is seeking my  
life, how much more might this Benjamite do so! Let him alone  
and let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. Perhaps the  
LORD will look upon my affliction and make it up to me with  
benefits for the curses he is uttering this day."

JOAB  
Yes my Lord.

SHIMEI  
I curse you in the name of Saul.

NATHANIEL  
Kill him.



SHIMEI

May all of you children be cursed.

DAVID

Let him be.

SCENE 3 ABSALOM'S CAMP

Absalom is standing.

AHITHOPHEL

My Lord and king.

ABSALOM

Are you not Ahithophel, my fathers counselor?

AHITHOPHEL

Long live the king!

ABSALOM

Is this your devotion to your my father? Why did you not go with your him? Or are you a spy

AHITHOPHEL

On the contrary, I am yours. All this people have chosen you to be their king. I was in attendance upon your father, so will I be in attendance before you. Whom should I serve, if not David's son?"

ABSALOM

Offer your counsel on what we should do.

AHITHOPHEL

Have relations with your father's concubines, whom he left behind to take care of the palace. When all Israel hears how defiant you have made yourself to your father, all your partisans will take courage.

ABSALOM

Superb idea.

AHITHOPHEL

The shame will be too much for him to bear.

ABSALOM

What more do you suggest?

AHITHOPHEL

Please let me choose twelve thousand men, and be off in pursuit of David tonight.

If I come upon him when he is weary and discouraged, I shall cause him panic. When all the people with him flee, I shall strike down the king alone. Then I can bring back the rest of the people to you, as a bride returns to her husband. It is the death of only one man you are seeking; then all the people will be at peace.

ABSALOM

This plan will be agreeable to all the elders of Israel.

Ahithophel exits.

Hushai runs forward and embraces  
Absalom

HUSHAI

My Lord and king. I too take refuge with you.

ABSALOM

You are welcome. Both of my father's chief counselors have now come to the cause of our Nation and joined me in the battle against my treacherous father.

HUSHAI

My allegiance is to you.

ABSALOM

I need your advice. Ahithophel proposes that twelve thousand men should go after the infidel king. Shall we follow his proposal?

HUSHAI

This time Ahithophel has not given good counsel.

ABSALOM

Why not?

HUSHAI

You know that your father and his men are as fierce as a bear in the wild robbed of her cubs. Moreover, since your father is skilled in warfare, he will not spend the night with the people.

ABSALOM

Not always.

HUSHAI

Even now he lies hidden in one of the caves or in some other place. And if some of our soldiers should fall at the first attack, whoever hears of it will say, 'Absalom's followers have been slaughtered.' Then even the brave man with the heart of a lion will lose courage. For all Israel knows that your father is a warrior and that those who are with him are brave.

ABSALOM

What do you counsel then?

HUSHAI

Let all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba, who are as numerous as the sands by the sea, be called up for combat; and go with them yourself. We can then attack him wherever we find him, settling down upon him as dew alights on the ground. None shall survive--neither he nor any of his followers.

ABSALOM

Brilliantk!

HUSHAI

As my lord wishes.

ABSALOM

Will you always you support me?

HUSHAI

With all my heart.

SCENE 4 OPEN FIELD

David, Joab, and Nathaniel are standing. And Hushai rushes into the field.

JOAB

What news!

HUSHAI

When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not acted upon, he saddled his ass and departed, going to his home in his own city. Then, having left orders concerning his family, he hanged himself. And so he died and was buried in his father's tomb.

NATHANIEL

The traitor has received his just due.

HUSHAI

Absalom has followed my advice and crossed the Jordan accompanied by all the Israelites

DAVID

I have made my decision. A third part of the soldiers Shall be put under Joab's command, a third under command of your brother Abishai, a third under command of Ittai the Gittite. I intend to go out with Joab myself.

HUSHAI

You must not come out with us. For if we should flee, we shall not count; even if half of us should die, we shall not count. You are equal to ten thousand of us. Therefore it is better that they have you to help them from the city.

DAVID

I will do what you think best. Be gentle with young Absalom for my sake, General Joab.

JOAB

What is your estimate of their strenght?

HUSHAI

Over twenty thousand.

DARK

Shouts and the voices of dying men and screaming women are heard. David sits stone faced

JOAB

The battle spreads out over that entire region, and the thickets consumed more combatants than the sword.

Soldier rushes in.

SOLDIER

The traitor is in our hands. He is tied to a terebinth tree.

JOAB

Why did you not strike him to the ground on the spot? Then it would have been my duty to give you fifty pieces of silver and a belt.

SOLDIER

Even if I already held a thousand pieces of silver in my two hands, I would not harm the king's son, for the king charged you and Abishai and Ittai in our hearing to protect the youth Absalom for his sake. Had I been disloyal and killed him, the whole matter would have come to the attention of the king, and you would stand aloof.

JOAB

I will not waste time with you in this way. I shall take three pikes in hand, and thrust for the heart of Absalom, if he is still hanging from the tree alive. Is he at the tree

SOLDIER

Let me run to take the good news to the king that the LORD has set him free from the grasp of his enemies.

JOAB

You are not the man to bring the news today. On some other day you may take the good news, but today you would not be bringing good news, for in fact the king's son will be dead.

DARK

Absalom is tied to a tree. Joab enters with his sword.

JOAB

My cousin, you must die shortly.

ABSALOM

As you wish.

JOAB

You have rebelled against your father. You have killed brother.

ABSALOM

I did what was just. My brother sinned against my sister. My father sinned against all Israel.

JOAB

So as you have killed others, so you shall die by the sword.

Joab plunges the sword into Absalom's heart and blood gushes to the floor.

ABSALOM

I die for my God and my country and my family at the hands of an evil cousin.

JOAB

Die now, traitor.

DARK

David is kneeling in prayer.

DAVID

LORD, do not withhold your compassion from me; may your enduring kindness ever preserve me. For all about me are evils beyond count; my sins so overcome me I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head; my courage fails me. LORD, graciously rescue me! Come quickly to help me, LORD!  
(Psalm 40)

Joab enters.

JOAB

Always in prayer, oh kind uncle.

DAVID

Surely you have good news!

JOAB

Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delivered up the men who rebelled against my lord the king.

DAVID

Is the youth Absalom safe?"

JOAB

Let my lord the king receive the good news that this day the LORD has taken your part, freeing you from the grasp of all who rebelled against you.

DAVID

Is young Absalom safe?

JOAB

May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rebel against you with evil intent be as that young man!

DAVID

Is he dead!

JOAB

Yes.

DAVID

My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son!

He begins crying.

JOAB

Why do you weep!

DAVID

My son, my son!

JOAB

My uncle, you have lost your son, but you are the king to millions of people.

DAVID

Can I not have my own grief?

JOAB

Today's victory is being turned into mourning for the whole army for they know that the king is grieving for his son. The soldiers shall steal from the city like men shamed by flight in battle.

DAVID

My son Absalom! Absalom! My son, my son!

JOAB

Though they saved your life and your sons' and daughters' lives, also the lives of your wives and those of your concubines, you have put all your soldiers to shame today. Loving those who hate you and hating those who love you. For you have shown today that officers and soldiers mean nothing to you. Indeed I am now certain that if Absalom were alive today and all of us dead, you would think that more suitable.

DAVID

STOP! Can I have my grief!

JOAB

He tried to kill you. Now then, get up! Go out and speak kindly to your soldiers. I swear by the LORD that if you do not go out, not a single man will remain with you overnight, and this will be a far greater disaster for you than any that has afflicted you from your youth until now.

DAVID

Only for my God and my country..

JOAB

Now you must make peace with all your countrymen.

Nathaniel, Bathsheba, and Hushai enter.

BATHSHEBA

The king delivered us from the clutches of our enemies, and it was he who rescued us from the grip of the Philistines.

NATHANIEL

And Absalom the traitor died in battle.

BATHSHEBA

My poor king.

Bathsheba, Joab, and Nathaniel embrace the king.

SCENE 5 DAVID'S BEDROOM MANY YEARS LATER

Bathsheba and Nathan are seated around the bed of David who is asleep. Bathsheba holds David's hand.

BATHSHEBA

My king, my king. Do you hear me?

NATHANIEL

Let him rest. He has only a short time to live. Even during these tragic days, we must prepare the future king to take over. The wolves are at our doorstep.

BATHSHEBA

Abishag, the Shunamite woman will arrive shortly. It hurts to leave him. And alone.

NATHANIEL

The servants will take care of him until she arrives.

BATHSHEBA

I only trust the Shunamite woman. I wonder if that snake Joab is holding her up.

NATHANIEL

He will have to be dealt with before the coronation. His sympathies lie totally with Adonijah, who feels he has first right to the throne. I understand he has acquired chariots, drivers, and fifty henchmen. The good king never rebuked him.



BATHSHEBA

But the King has already chosen Solomon. You are right. We must take drastic measures.

NATHANIEL

Both Joab and Adijonah must die by strangulation. Young Solomon must show the Nation and God that he is worthy of being King of Israel by strangling both his traitorous brother and cousin.

BATHSHEBA

And surely Shimei the Benjamite must die. How he insulted my husband.

NATHANIEL

As the king wills. More importantly, he must die to prevent a civil war.

BATHSHEBA

And do God's work on earth in the name of our king.

Abishag enters wearing a hood.

BATHSHEBA

You always arrive so early, my dear Abishag. Why were you detained tonight.

ABISHAG

Several of the King's wives approached me to visit the king.

BATHSHEBA

And what did you tell them, sweet Abishag?

ABISHAG

That they must first go through Nathaniel.

BATHSHEBA

You are an intelligent young woman. The king is to rest. No one is to gain access.

ABISHAG

Joab is waiting outside.

NATHANIEL

He will be spoken to.

Bathsheba and Nathaniel walk towards the door.

BATHSHEBA

Again, No one is to gain entry but Nathaniel and I.

ABISHAG

Yes, your majesty.

BATHSHEBA

And make sure that he is warm at all times.

ABISHAG

Yes, your majesty.

NATHANIEL

And did Adijonah speak to you?

ABISHAG

Yes, but I did not respond.

NATHANIEL

He will be dealt with by the new King.

.

Bathsheba and Nathaniel exit. Abishag puts a blanket over the king. He begins turning.

DAVID

Who are you? Let me touch your face. Come closer.

ABISHAG

I am Abishag, the Shunamite, your concubine and caretaker.

DAVID

Ah, you are Abigail? My first wife.

ABISHAG

Abigail is dead.

DAVID

Then you are Maacah, mother of Absalom, Tamar, and Adijonah?

ABISHAG

No, I am Abishag the Shunamite girl.

DAVID

What are you doing here?

ABISHAG

I am here to keep you warm at night. Your body is frigid.

DAVID

Ah, yes. You are the one Adijonah wants as his concubine. Disrespectful to his father and the chosen king!

ABISHAG

Rest, my King.

DAVID

Where is my Bathsheba?

ABISHAG

She just left. She has been with you all day.

DAVID

Ah, yes she is preparing the future King Solomon for his coronation.

ABISHAG

Rest, my king.

DAVID

And where is Tamar? I want to see her.

ABISHAG

Princess Tamar does not leave her house ever.

DAVID

Is she still obese?

ABISHAG

They say she is now very thin because she no longer eats.

DAVID

I want to see my daughter. My only daughter. Please fetch her.

ABISHAG

They say she speaks to no man.

DAVID

She is my daughter!

ABISHAG

In the morning, King David. You must rest now.

DAVID

Then get Amnon and Absalom.

ABISHAG

Amnon and Absalom passed away a long time ago.

DAVID

No, they are still alive. Amnon is eighteen. Absalom is seventeen, and Tamar is sixteen.

ABISHAG

Would you like to have some water?

DAVID

No. And where is Michal?

ABISHAG

She is back with her tribe.

DAVID

I never did love her.

ABISHAG

Drink some water.

DAVID

My breathing is fine. Come closer. Very close.

ABISHAG

Yes, Sir.

DAVID

Are you the Angel of Death.

ABISHAG

No I am Abishag the Shunamite.

DAVID

Where is Joab!

ABISHAG

I do not know. The Queen wants you to rest.

DAVID

Both Joab and Adijonah must die at the hands of Solomon.

ABISHAG

Why do you say such a thing!

DAVID

To prevent civil war. The nation of God comes first. I have spent my whole life serving God, country, and family. I served my God. I saved my country. But I failed with my family.

ABISHAG

You have done your best.

DAVID

Is Solomon the right choice?

ABISHAG

Prophets say he will build the Temple.

DAVID

I am about to die, oh Angel of Death. Will I be remembered?

ABISHAG

The prophets say that from your loins will spring the savior of mankind.

DAVID

I did so little.

ABISHAG

You saved a nation, you created a Kingdom, you wrote fifty Psalms, you played the harp, you slew our enemies. You are God's chosen.

DAVID

But why?

ABISHAG

Only God can answer. But they say God spoke through you in the Psalms.

DAVID

I have no friends, my family is dissipated. I have but one thing.

ABISHAG

What is that?

DAVID

My God. Let us recite a Psalm I wrote a long time ago.

ABISHAG AND DAVID AND  
AUDIENCE

"The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack. In green pastures you let me graze; to safe waters you lead me; for the sake of your name. Even when I walk through a dark valley, I fear no harm for you are at my side; your rod and staff give me courage. You set a table before me as my enemies watch; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Only goodness and love will pursue me all the days of my life; I will dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come."

ABISHAG

My king, my king.

DAVID

And now I utter my last breath. I hope God will forgive me.

ABISHAG

My king, my king!

Suddenly the room turns dark. Abishag opens the shutters, and a star shines through the window.

DAVID

I feel cold again. Come and lie with me.

ABISHAG

Can you rise to see the star that shines through the window? I have never seen one like it before.

DAVID

How so?

ABISHAG

The star has six sides. Perhaps it is the Star of David.

DAVID

I see it.

ABISHAG AND AUDIENCE

Therefore my heart is glad, my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure. For you will not abandon me to the underworld, nor let your faithful servant see the pit. You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever. My last breath, oh Angel of Death. (Psalm 16)

Oh, Angel of Death

DAVID

David dies. Suddenly light comes through the window and permeates the entire room.