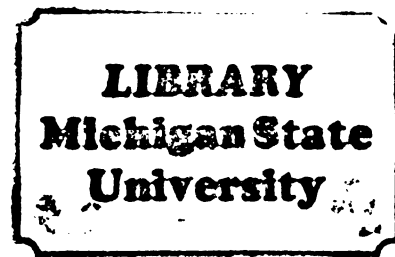


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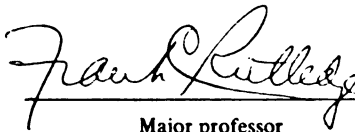
ALL MY SONS ARE STRANGERS

presented by

NORMAN SHIFFMAN

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

M.A. degree in THEATRE


Major professor

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ALL MY SONS ARE STRANGERS

by

Norman Shiffman

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
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Theatre Department

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ABSTRACT

ALL MY SONS ARE STRANGERS

By

Norman Shiffman

The process of succession from David to Solomon is ambiguous leaving open the possibility for speculation. A gnawing question is why did David keep his choice a secret until almost the last minute? Like any good mystery, one is forced to work one's way backwards. Examining David's last instruction to Solomon, one discovers three major plots. David's concept of his own kingship; his obsession with Saul, his predecessor; and his anger at Jacob, his life-time right-hand man. Continuing to work one's way backward, one discovers that the only time that Jacob disobeyed David was when he killed David's son Absalom after Absalom's rebellion. The importance of this incident can be measured by the space given in the Bible to Absalom's rebellion. It is longer than the space allotted for Solomon's entire reign. And it ends with David's famous "Absalom Absalom" outcry. The circumstantial evidence points to David never having forgiven Jacob for killing the only son that David genuinely loved. But due to political weakness, David had to wait to take his revenge. My hypothesis to the mystery of succession is that David waited to see which contender to the throne Jacob would eventually support. Then David chose the other to have him settle his score with Jacob. Within this larger plot, the other two sub-plots are intertwined. The play is written in a compromise style between the Biblical and current vernacular in order to try to maintain interest and yet recreate a feeling of authenticity.

CHARACTERS

King David (DA-VID)

King Saul (SHA-UL)

Ghost of Samuel (SHMU-EL)

Absalom AV-SHA-LOM) - David's son

Amnon (AM-NON) - David's oldest son

Jonadab (YO-NA-DAV) - Amnon's friend

Joan (YO-AV) - Commander of David's army

Benaiah (B-NA-YA-HU) - Commander of David's bodyguard

Nathan (NA-TAN) - Court Prophet

Abiathar (AV-YA-TAR) - High Priest

Zadok (TSA-DOK) - Priest

Jehoshaphat (YE-HO-SHE-FAT) - David's official historian

Seraiah (S-RA-YAH) - David's treasurer

Sheba (SHEI-VAH) - Benjamite, and Absalom's ally

Shimei (SHEI-MEI) - Distant relative of Saul

Abishag (AV-VEI-SHAG) - Last of David's concubines

Tamar (TA-MAR) - David's daughter and Absalom's sister

Michal (MEI-HAL) - David's wife and Saul's daughter

Bath-sheba (BAT-SHE-VAH) - David's wife and Solomon's mother

Solomon (SHLO-MO) - David's son (not a speaking part)

ACT I

(OPENS IN DAVID'S BEDCHAMBER. ABISHAG IS PLAYING DAVID'S HARP. DAVID IS LYING ON THE BED FACING AWAY FROM THE AUDIENCE)

Abishag

The strings of pain
Cut through the hearts
Of mistresses and wives
Mothers of vain men,
Who when
They come to win our love,
Ravage body and soul,
And care not whereof

(WHINING NOISES FROM THE BED. ABISHAG CRAWLS INTO BED AND CRADLES DAVID)

Yes, a burst of cold guilt has swept across your dreams.
Who is it this time that's risen up from the shadows to
call you to account. Shsh. They'll soon go away.

Abishag is here to melt the sullenness from your heart.

Let me sing you one of your very own songs:

"My enemies speak evil concerning me,

'When will he die, and his name perish?'

They say, 'A base thing has fastened upon him;

He will not rise again who is now ill in

bed!" (from psalm 41)

(DAVID IS HAVING A BAD DREAM. BITS OF THE DREAM FLASH
ACROSS THE STAGE. FIRST JOAB APPEARS HOLDING HIS SWORD)

Joab

My Lord David. We have defeated them. The rabble

(NATHAN QUICKLY APPEARS IN DAVID'S DREAM)

Nathan

Remember. Remember David that you are God's annointed.

You will walk in the ways of the Lord Yahveh, and "thy throne shall be established forever. (samuel II, 7.16)".

(JEHOSHAPHAT APPEARS READING A SCROLL)

Jehoshaphat

And David slew Moab. And he slew Rehob. And Zabab, and Aramea, and Aram, and Amelek.

Joab

(WAVING HIS SWORD)

Thus, with my strong right arm I deliver your enemies into your hands. I delivered Hamath, and Edom, and Thebez, and Jerusalem.

Absalom? Your son Absalom is.... is.... is...

Nathan

Choose David! Choose! Good or evil. Evil or good. Walk. Walk in the ways of the Lord Yahveh.

Joab

Absalom? Absalom is.... is.... is...

(THE VOICE AND LAUGHTER OF SAUL)

Saul

The people love me, Saul. Not David. Davis is cursed. The sword shall never depart from the House of David. Ha ha. David is cursed.

(ALL THE CHARACTERS AND VOICES OF HIS DREAM BEGIN TO TALK AT THE SAME TIME REPEATING THEIR SAME LITTLE SPEECHES. SUDDENLY A SHADOW OF A TREE WITH A BODY DANGLING FROM IT IS CAST OVER THE SCENE. DAVID WAKES UP WITH A LOUD SCREAM)

David

Absalom!!

(SCENE BLACKS OUT. OPENS AGAIN IN COURT CHAMBERS. NATHAN IS PRECIDING OVER THE COURT. PRESENT ARE

JOAB, BENNAIAH, ABIATHAR, ZADOK, SERAIAH AND
JEHOSHAPHAT. THEY ARE ARGUING AMONG THEMSELVES)

Nathan

(INTERRUPTS THE DISPUTE)

No matter what, the festival of the Lord Yahveh must be conducted this year with the same grandeur as in previous years. All the eyes of our enemies will be watching to spy what weaknesses they can discover in the House of David.

Joab

The Arameans and Syrians have already begun to conduct small raids in the north. Testing our defenses and our will to pursue and punish such crimes.

Seraiah

It is already widely known that David has long been stricken with some morose malady. The incoming tribute and gifts have slowed down to mere tokens.

Joab

Seraiah, must you always speak as a clerk counting the sheckles in your purse.

Seraiah

Though I'm but the humble treasurer, and not Joab, commander of all the mighty men, still someone must keep account of what it will all cost.

Benaiah

Why do we not form an alliance with Hiram of Tyre against Damascus as Prince Solomon so wisely advises.

Abiathar

And has Prince Solomon also already promises away the coast of Carmel that Hiram so anxiously covets.

Benaiah

Abiathar the High Priest suspects everyone of impiety.

Joab

Benaiah, you forget yourself and your place in the court. You are merely commander over the palace guards. And, as such, still under my command. Only I will speak for the army to the court.

Zadok

But Benaiah speaks sound words. And I agree with Nathan, Prophet and Counsul to the court, that we must display the full splendor of David's glory.

Abiathar

Zadok agrees with anyone about anything. He is a priest of deep convictions.

Zadok

Unlike Abiathar who is High Priest of archaic incantations.

Nathan

We are not here to quarrel. But to protect the strength of the kingdom.

(TURNS TO JEHOSEPHAT)

Jehoshaphat, you sit each day with the King and transcribe the memory of his glorious deeds into the Book of Life, how does the King fare? Would he be able to hold himself straight and partake of ceremonies?

Jehoshaphat

He is, as may be expected of a man of his years, deep inside his memories and remembrances. The maiden Abishag makes him rest and keeps him warm and comfortable.

Nathan

David has grown self-absorbed and mysterious.

Joab

The very kind of brooding he ridiculed in Saul.

Abiathar

All old kings turn into frightened children when confronted with the truth of their mere mortalness. They seek to appease their sins with belated supplications.

Nathan

David does not recognize the dangers of his solitude. We must help him overcome the perils of his despondency. Therefore, we will conduct the festival as if all is secure in the House of David.

Abiathar

Why? Why may not Prince Adonijah, David's eldest son, not stand in his father's place?

Benaiah

(JUMPS UP EXCITED)

Why may not Prince Solomon stand in his father's place?

Zadok

Indeed, why not Solomon.

Abiathar

Solomon's mother is not from the tribe of Judah.

Zadok

All the better reason to show the many nations between our boundaries that they are now part of the kingdom of the House of David.

Abiathar

David is from the tribe of Judah. And Adonijah was born in Hebron.

Zadok

And Solomon was born in Jerusalem.

Abiathar

It was the loyalty of Judah that built the House of David.

Benaiah

It is the strength of my professional troops that now defends that house.

Joab

It is the strength of my mighty men of Judah and Israel that protects the kingdom. Do not ever forget that Benaiah.

Abiathar

It was Judah that crowned David King. How long do you think it will take for our enemies to begin trying to break away pieces of the kingdom when they see that Judah and David stand apart. Only Adonijah standing in David's place can show the world that the House of David is bound with the might of Judah.

(UPROAR AND DEBATING INSUES)

Nathan

(STANDS UP AND SHOUTS)

I will not allow this bickering to destroy us from within. Here is what I decree. That at the festival of the Tabernacle, when it is time to receive the first harvest and bless the land to be blessed unto the people, that I and Joab shall stand together in David's place.

To show the people of Judah and Israel, and all the nations of the world, that the power of the Lord Yahveh and the strength of the mighty men of Judah and Israel are united with the House of David.

(THE COURT DISBANDS. EVERYONE LEAVES, AND JOAB IS ON HIS WAY OUT WHEN ABIATHAR STOPS HIM)

Abiathar

You see Joab. You see that what I have been telling you is so. You see how Zadok and Benaiah work to divide the court and undermine the unity of the kingdom.

Joab

See what? Two overly ambitious underlings who can easily be put in their place act stupidly.

Abiathar

Solomon guides their actions.

Joab

It is not with Solomon, but with David wherein lies the cause of confusion. I tell you Abiathar, this remoteness David wraps himself within is weakening the strength of the kingdom. An army cannot fight under the weight of such uncertainty.

Abiathar

The mercenaries have no such doubts. They clutch Solomon's gold that Benaiah slips into their palms. Solomon is scheming to steal the army from under you.

Joab

Look to your own priests. How do you allow Zadok to speak against you to your face. And as for the army, they will follow me as always.

Abiathar

I know. I know Zadok conducts sacrifices throughout the land and distributes the offerings in Solomon's name.

Joab

You are needlessly alarmed. I have no doubts that Solomon too has great ambitions. But what can he do against the mighty men of Judah if they wish it to be against him.

Abiathar

Solomon surrounds himself with this new class of court officials who have no respect for loyalty to one's tribe or region.

Joab

Abiathar, we have travelled together with David from the beginning. And you know all that I have done for the King. Do you think that David will not remember all that his mighty men have done for him.

Abiathar

I know all you have done for David. That is why I ask you to speak to him. He will listen to you. Tell him that he must declare Adonijah King. We haven't much time before David journeys to join his fathers in everlasting sleep. Only Adonijah can maintain the allegiances of Judah and Israel. Without such allegiance the kingdom will dissolve from within, let alone what our enemies will try to do from without.

Joab

Why must David declare Adonijah King when Adonijah will be King just the same after David does journey to join his fathers.

Abiathar

Because the land will be thrust into doubt and suspicion. Why, the people will ask, didn't David name an heir to his throne before he died? Surely all his sons are unworthy.

Joab

And is that not true. All of David's sons are unworthy. The more unworthy, the more he pines after their love. Like a sick doe mourns over its dumb careless fawn.

Abiathar

A man becomes worthy of being King only after he has learned to be King. How long did it take David to learn to be King? After how many wars, and famines and rebellions? But who else could make us into a nation? And how else was it to have been done? Now. Now we need Adonijah to keep us together as a nation.

Joab

Would David listen I will tell him as you say. For you are right. The kingdom needs to have David declare his heir. And as Adonijah is the eldest and from the tribe of Judah. I will tell David to declare Adonijah, King. He will listen to my words.

(THEY LEAVE TOGETHER. FROM BEHIND A HIDING PLACE, ZADOK AND BENAIAH EMERGE)

Benaiah

Abiathar has convinced Joab to support Adonijah as David's heir.

Zadok

And Joab behaves as Solomon predicted he would. He sides with his old comrades from the tribe of Judah.

But each day David delays naming Adonijah his heir,
the weaker becomes his claim to the throne. Abiathar
knows that.

Benaiah

Don't rely just on Solomon's cleverness. Solomon
may know how to capitalize upon the greedy instincts
of men, but is that enough to overcome the power of
Joab? Joab, remember, can take matters into his own
hands as he has done in the past.

Zadok

But Adonijah is a coward.

Benaiah

Kings are ruled by generals, Zadok. Generals are
not ruled by Kings.

Zadok

Benaiah, who is with Adonijah?

Benaiah

All the old bandit veterans from Judah who feel
insulted that David has come to rely on my professional
troops.

Zadok

No doubt, all those who are envious of the authority
of Jerusalem over the tribes will flock to their camp.

Benaiah

Let them. Solomon has allies who will send him chariots
and cavalry. King Hiram of Tyre himself will lead his
legions against Gibeon and cut off the rabble of Israel
from Jerusalem.

Zadok

Will it come to that?

Benaiah

Can it be otherwise in the House of David. For didn't David himself ally with the Philistines against Saul. And then Absalom allied himself with the Benjamites against his father David.

Zadok

Why has David refused naming an heir?

Benaiah

He behaves as if possessed of some malicious force that cuts him off from the world.

Zadok

Who can understand David's bitter heart. Yet it rules over our futures.

Benaiah

Has Bath-sheba yet spoken to David? Perhaps David's favorite wife may persuade him to Solomon's cause.

Zadok

I do believe both Solomon and I have underrated you. You are a more able politician than you appear to be. Yes, an appeal to David's buried soft sentiments may just work. Afterall, didn't he commit a most scandalous transgression upon her account.

Benaiah

(TURNS TO THE BEDCHAMBER)

Listen. The maiden Abishag is playing David's harp.

Zadok

Is that the music of his soul? The rueful song of waning flory. Or is it just an accompaniment to David's melancholy.

(SCENE SHIFTS BACK INSIDE DAVID'S BEDCHAMBER. ABISHAG IS PLAYING THE HARP)

Abishag

And in the days
When David grew old,
That his blood could no more
Keep his body from cold,
I Abishag
Was brought to his suite,
That my flesh should provide
A transfusion of heat.

The king looked down
Upon me from his throne.
His head was carved out
From Jerusalem stone.
His eyes lingered long
Upon my maidenhood.
He smiled and I blushed
And all understood.

He rose up
To the crest of his stooped height,
And everyone bowed
Before his legendary might.
"Israel and Judah
Should have no shame,
For this gift to their king
Which with honor I claim."

The old wrinkled king
Led me down the path,
From sentimental innocence
To its infamous aftermath.

And there upon the sheets
Of the conjugal bed,

Was I with widowhood
Forever to be wed.

(KNOCK ON THE DOOR)

Who is it?

Jehoshaphat

It's only me child, the king's secretary, Jehoshaphat.

Abishag

(GOES TO OPEN THE DOOR)

Just a moment.

(OPENS THE DOOR)

Jehoshaphat

(ENTERS)

And how is our king today?

Abishag

He journeys through the passages of his memories.

Jehoshaphat

Did he speak of his dreams?

Abishag

No. He stirs when some recrimination disturbs his
sleep. But quickly he returns to cradle himself in
his agedness.

Jehoshaphat

Do not be embarrassed child. You are the warmth that
each day ignites the star of Judah and Israel still
shining his light over our destinies.

Abishag

I am only but a handmaiden to the annointed of God.

Jehoshaphat

As I was once a humble scribe chosen to harvest the glories of his deeds and preserve them in legend.

Abishag

Was it you then that composed the song:
 "Saul hath slain his thousands
 And David his ten thousands."

Jehoshaphat

One of his favorites

Abishag

Yes. What man does not enjoy his vanities.

Jehoshaphat

Hush child! Mind to keep a respectful tongue. You are to remember your duties. To nurse the king and make him feel comfortable during his remaining days. And to report to me, and only me, the king's melancholies. I will set them down so there will be no mistakes. Now tell him I am here.

Abishag

(WALKS OVER TO DAVID AND SHAKES HIM ON THE SHOULDER)

My Lord David. Jehoshaphat is here. Remember. He comes each day to transcribe the memories of your glories deeds.

David

Jehoshaphat is here?

Abishag

Yes my Lord David.

David

Are they gone?

Jehoshaphat

Who, my Lord David?

David

Look. Look outside. Who is there?

Jehoshaphat

It is night. I cannot see anyone

David

(SITS UP IN BED. WHISPERS)

Shsh. I have enemies everywhere listening anxiously to hear my last breath. But I hide it under my pillow and escape underwater across the river Jordon.

(FLOPS BACK DOWN ON THE BED)

I'm playing dead. See. Do you hear them listening The dead can hear the living trying to steal their last breath.

(PAUSE)

They're leaving. Yes. I've tricked them again. I'm still the genius of intrigue. Come here child and help me to my chair,

(ABISHAG HELPS DAVID WALK TO HIS CHAIR)

Where did we leave off?

(DAVID SITS DOWN. JEHOSEPHAT READS FROM HIS SCROLL)

Jehoshaphat

"And the Arameans fled before Israel; and David slew of the Arameans seven hundred drivers of chariots, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shoback the captain of their host, so that he died there, (Samuel II, 10.18)

David

Glorious deeds. Glorious deeds. So much blood. The more blood, the greater the glory. That is the truth of glory. Sing for me Abishag. Sing of David's glory.

Abishag

(RETURNS TO THE HARP AND PLAYS)

"Of old thou didst speak in a vision to thy faithful ones saying 'I have set a young man over the Mighty ones, I have found David my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him....

No enemy shall attack him.

The wicked shall never oppress him'."

David

(BREAKS IN TO CONTINUE THE SONG)

"Thou hast put an end to his glory and cast his throne to the ground.

Thou hast cut short the days of his youth; thou covered him with shame. (from psalm 89)"

Yes, my enemies are plotting against me. Always plotting. But I will defeat them. I will destroy their houses and cast them out of my kingdom.

(LAUGHS, TURNS INTO COUGH)

What do they ask about me in court?

Jehoshaphat

They ask how you are.

David

Everyone's impatient for me to reach my fatal moment. What else do they ask?

Jehoshaphat

It's not what they ask, but what they would ask.

David

And what would they ask?

Jehoshaphat

They would ask whom David will choose as king.

David

Whom will David choose. (LAUGHS)

"For strangers have risen against me (from psalm 54)"

All my sons are strangers. Yet each carries part of me. Do I love only that in them which is part of me? Which part of me do I love the most? The simple naiveness of Adonijah: the ostentatious competency of Solomon: the crude bawdiness of Amnon: or the poetic sentimentalness of Absalom. The shepherd, the ruler, the warrior or the lover.

Jehoshaphat

But my Lord David, Amnon and Absalom are dead.

David

Dead? They are dead? Yes. Yes I remember. So the warrior and lover are never meant to be King. Play. Play for me a song of glory. To David, father of fatherless sons.

(ENTER BATH-SHEBA)

Ah, my favorite wife Bath-sheba. No doubt come to look to her son's interests.

Bath-sheba

Do you accuse me of scheming to exploit the tender vows of husband and wife? I have come to see that you are well.

David

Dear lady. I know the practice of power relies on the intervention of the subtler human crafts.

Bath-sheba

(BOWS) I am your loyal servant.

David

How times have changed. Devotion nowadays, hides behind the mask of prudence. When I took you, remember, all of Jerusalem knew my sin. But then, I only had my honor to lose. Solomon has a kingdom to gain.

Bath-sheba

(WALKS AROUND EXAMINING ABISHAG)

So this is the one blossom for whom all of Judah and Israel searched to find the potion of renewed virility.

Abishag

I am Abishag, a Shunammite from the Village of Solam.

Bath-sheba

Have you found favor in his eyes?

Abishag

He is very kind to me.

Bath-sheba

My husband can be very charming. Yes, I would say my beauty was once equal to yours. My fullness was more than ample to satisfy his appetite. But the years turn desire into a clumsy joke. Passion is no more than a self-consuming act which leaves us empty.

Abishag

You are Bath-sheba before whom all the daughters of Israel cannot compare.

Bath-sheba

The country is full of diplomats now that we've grown into a kingdom. Does my husband sing to you? David enjoys seducing all his women.

David

No more than they enjoy the honor.

Abishag

He is God's anointed.

David

I'm tired. I wish to rest.

Abishag

Please your lady.

(BOWS TO BATH-SHEBA), AND GOES TO HELP DAVID)

Bath-sheba

So the Lion of Judah would lie down and curl up like a little lamb.

David

What is it? Have you come just to mock my weariness? Haven't I had more than my share of strife? Haven't I had more than my share of enigma? Yes, I want to lie down, and perhaps search out my own soul.

Bath-sheba

Still playing the part of a poet trying to imitate the philosopher.

But the wolves are outside your door waiting for their moment to snatch away your legacy.

(PAUSE. NO ANSWER)

Well. This is peculiar. No reaction to threats upon

the one thing David is more jealous of? You're trying to ignore me. However let that pass for the moment.

David. It's me Bath-sheba. Remember Bath-sheba who filled your lust to the brim. I've come to remind you. Need I remind you of the promise you promised me when my first born baby died as punishment for your blasphemy?

(PAUSE. NO ANSWER)

You've forgotten. That's a convenient habit you have. But I haven't forgotten. I hold you to your promise. You came and comforted me. We lay together that very night the child died. You promised me that if ever I begot you a son, he shall be king after you. You promised that Solomon shall be king.

(LEAVES)

David

(SITS DOWN. TO HIMSELF)

What wouldn't I have promised to quiet the grief of a wailing woman. It's the poet in me. But haven't I also known a father's grief? Don't I still weep over my grief? Is not the love of a father for his son more powerful than that of his mother? She is bound to him through flesh. But a father is bound to his son through his soul.

(STANDS UP AND CRIES OUT)

Absalom. Absalom my son. Why? Why did you turn against me? Why did you kill our love? You assassinated my soul.

(SLUMPS TO THE FLOOR CRYING. ABISHAG AND JEHOSEPHAT LIFT HIM BACK ONTO HIS CHAIR. THEY LET HIM CRY HIMSELF OUT. HE RECOVERS HIMSELF)

Where. Where were we?

Jehoshaphat

(READS FROM THE SCROLL)

"And David again gathered together all the chosen men of

Israel. And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him, from Baale-judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God.

(Samuel II, 6.1&2)"

David

My entry into Jerusalem. Yes. Was there ever such a day of glory. I remember. I remember.

(FLASHBACK TO PROCESSION BRINGING THE ARK OF THE COVENANT INTO JERUSALEM. NATHAN, ABIATHAR AND ZADOK ARE LEADING. DAVID IS NEXT FOLLOWED BY JOAB AND BENAIAH. THE REST OF THE COURT IS PRESENT. ALSO AMNON, ABSALOM AND TAMAR. STAGE IS FILLED WITH DANCING AND MUSICAL NOISES. THE ACTION SUBSIDES WHEN ABIATHAR AND ZADOK CONDUCT THE OFFERING AT THE ALTAR)

Abiathar

The Lord Yahveh has blessed the children of Israel and Judah. Praised be his name. And praised be the name of David, King of Judah and Israel. God's annointed.

(MERRIMENT RESUMES. SEVERAL DANCING GIRLS DANCE ACROSS DAVID'S PATH AND SORT OF FLIRT WITH HIM. DAVID TAKES OFF HIS ROBE AND JOINS IN THE DANCING. THE REST OF THE ACTIVITIES SUBSIDE AS EVERYONE WATCHES DAVID. HE CONTINUES TAKING OFF HIS CLOTHING UNTIL HE IS DOWN TO HIS LOIN CLOTH. AND HIS DANCING BECOMES MORE AND MORE ENTHUSIASTIC. FINALLY EXHAUSTED, HE FLOPS INTO HIS THRONE WHICH HAS BEEN SET DOWN DURING HIS DANCING)

David

Praised the Lord Yahveh. He fills me with joy overflowing.

(JEHOSHAPHAT BRINGS DAVID HIS ROBE AND CROWN. DAVID PUTS THEM ON)

Jehoshaphat

A glorious day my lord. Today all of Judah and Israel have come to David in his city of Jerusalem.

David

I owe much to my mighty men. To Joab who infiltrated through the sewers and surprised the Jubusites out of their loin cloths.

(EVERYONE LAUGHS)

To my sons

(AMNON AND ABSALOM STEP FORWARD)

who guarded my flanks by watching over the safety of my concubines.

(MORE LAUGHTER)

To my wives. Who did not guard anything but their modesties. And that to no avail.

(MORE LAUGHTER)

For as you all know, I have a whole brood of brats. But they are all dear to me. All my subjects are dear to me. The whole world is dear to me. Except my enemies, who are anything but darling. (MORE LAUGHTER)

(MICHAL APPROACHES DAVID)

And my dear wife Michal whom I rescued from a dull husband.

Michal

The price you had to pay for receiving the loyalties of the tribes of Israel.

David

Saul's daughter thinks that political alliances are consummated under the bedroom canopy.

Michal

Saul's daughter thinks that David has disgraced his crown.

Dancing shamelessly like a mere shepherd before the eyes of handmaidens and servants. Like the prostitutes in the temple of Baal that twist their groins and fondle their naked bodies before they are auctioned to those that can pay the highest fees.

David

(JUMPS UP AND SHOUTS ANGRILY AT MICHAL)

Yes! Yes! "Before the Lord who chose me above thy father. (Samuel II,6.21)" Before him will I rejoice.

Michal

My father knew how to show honor.

David

Before the Lord who chose me to be king over Judah and Israel. Before him will I rejoice.

Michal

My father knew how to receive honor.

David

Before the Lord who delivered Jerusalem into my hands. Before him will I rejoice.

Michal

My father didn't have to uncover himself to show his nobleness.

David

(RUNS DOWN AND GRABS TWO OF THE DANCING GIRLS. LEADS THEM BACK TO MICHAL WITH HIS ARMS AROUND THEIR SHOULDERS)

And with the handmaidens of Jerusalem. With them will I rejoice.

(RELEASES THE GIRLS. WALKS BACKWARD TO HIS THRONE SHOUTING AT MICHAL)

But with you! With you! Will I never rejoice. Saul shall never have a claim to my throne. And Saul's name will be forgotten from this earth.

(SHOUTS EXTRA LOUD)

Forever!!

(SCENE FREEZES. DAVID TALKS TO JEHOSEPHAT AS IF HE WERE BACK IN THE PRESENT. LIGHTS DIM ON THE REST OF THE SCENE)

Saul, that contemptible Benjamite. Always hovering nearby. Waiting. Waiting for any opportunity to slander my name. To damn me to the gods. But he is damned. Him and his whole tribe. I have condemned his memory to heresy. It will be cursed down through the mouths of generations until it is obliterated from the tongue.

(BACKGROUND LAUGHTER OF SAUL)

Laugh. Laugh in hell. See. See all this splendor. It is all part of David's glory.

Jehoshaphat

What is it my Lord David? Whom are you shouting at?

David

(SNAPS OUT OF HIS HALLUCINATION)

Yes. Where were we?

Jehoshaphat

Entering Jerusalem.

David

Jerusalem. David's city. The bride David chose for his Absalom.

(THE LIGHTS COME BACK UP ON THE ENTIRE ENTRY SCENE AND THE CELEBRATION ACTION RESUMES WHERE IT LEFT OFF)

Let us rejoice this day. On. On to the palace.

(THE CELEBRATION AND THE PROCESSION OVES OFF TOWARDS THE PALACE. AS THEY MOVE OFF, SHEBA IS SEEN SITTING ON THE GROUND IN THE POSITION OF A BLIND BEGGAR. THE LAST FEW STRAGGLERS THROW HIM SOME COINS. ABSALOM LINGERS TILL EVERYONE HAS LEFT. HE'S PUZZLED BY THE BEGGAR. TAKES A FEW COINS AND PLACES THEM IN THE BEGGARS HAT)

Absalom

God's blessing be upon you this day.

Sheba

And may the gods protect Absalom, Lord of Jerusalem.

Absalom

How do you know me?

Sheba

The same way as you know me.

Absalom

I don't know you at all.

Sheba

(JUMPS UP AND BOWS TO ABSALOM)

Sheba, son of Bickri. A Benjamite.

Absalom

A Benjamite? Here? To honor my father?

Sheba

If that's what it costs to practice my trade.

Absalom

(LAUGHS) But you're not blind.

Sheba

Oh I'm far more needy than any beggar. A beggar, at least, is born into a respectful profession. But I was born to

always choose the losing side.

Absalom

Come. There are no sides anymore. Israel and Judah are now one nation.

Sheba

One nation on top of another nation.

Absalom

You speak unjustly. It's your beggar's way of trying to arouse my pity. But come and tell me. Doesn't it hurt to sit in such an awkward position?

Sheba

Yes, But the feeling of pain gives me credibility.

Absalom

Show me how you do it. Perhaps I might want to come someday and join you.

Sheba

The son of David? Begging?

Absalom

If this drought keeps up and I can't harvest any crops, I might need to.

Sheba

(LAUGHS) Absalom has the good heart essential for becoming a successful beggar.

(THEY BOTH SIT DOWN ON THE GROUND. SHEBA TRIES TO TEACH ABSALOM THE POSTURE. AFTER SEVERAL TRIES THEY BOTH FALL DOWN AND SIT UP LAUGHING)

Absalom

Tell me Sheba, how you came to becoming a beggar?

Sheba

Where should I start. I could begin by blaming it all on the Philistines, as is customary and fashionable. For if there would not have been any Philistines, there would not have been any Saul; or any David; or even any Absalom.

Absalom

(LAUGHS) Or any story to tell.

Sheba

But what is life without a few Philistines.

Absalom

Good point.

Sheba

Being born a Benjamite, I naturally was expected to do all those things that are naturally expected of Benjamites to do.

Absalom

I didn't know there were special expectations of Benjamites.

Sheba

Alas yes. Benjamites are expected to take upon themselves the burden of impossibility. For how can a small tribe like us defeat all the Philistines in this world.

Absalom

(LAUGHS) But as you see, we have defeated the Philistines.

Sheba

Only one strain. For Philistines come in an infinite variety of species.

Absalom

You're speaking in parables.

Sheba

I beg the pardon of my Lord Absalom. It's a bad habit I've picked up since becoming a beggar.

Absalom

How long ago did that blessed event occur?

Sheba

It goes back to when I returned from the battle of Mount Gilboa.

Absalom

(IMPRESSED) You fought at Mount Gilboa?

Sheba

Well actually, I didn't do as much fighting as fleeing.

Absalom

But you were there.

Sheba

You could say I made an appearance.

Absalom

Why do you make light of it?

Sheba

Because, my Lord Absalom, I do not wish to be mistaken for a hero. Heroism is outlawed these days.

Absalom

That's unkind.

Sheba

Such kindness that befell the brave Abner, commander of Saul's mighty men, at the hands of Joab, is one honor I would gladly forego.

Absalom

You needn't fear anything. I will let it be known throughout the land that Sheba is a friend of Absalom.

Sheba

Can Absalom protect all the dispossessed of Israel?

Absalom

(STANDS UP)

You're making fun of me. You needn't be sarcastic. We are at peace now.

Sheba

The price of peace can be bought at the expense of peace.

Absalom

Again you speak unkindly.

Sheba

The Lord Absalom feels only kindness in his heart. May God protect his kind heart.

(SHEBA RESUMES HIS BEGGAR'S ROLE)

Alms. Alms for a child of Israel. Alms for an orphan of Judah.

Absalom

You are a holy man Sheba. It takes faith to appeal to the charity of an enemy.

Sheba

Alms for a soldier of misfortune.

(ABSALOM DROPS A COIN IN HIS HAT)

Thank you Lord of Judah. May the Gods protect your peace.

(SCENE OF THE PAST BLACKS OUT, AND DAVID'S BEDCHAMBER
SCENE LIGHTS UP. THE PRESENT RESUMES)

Jehoshaphat

"And David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem
(Samuel II, 12.31)"

(JOAB ENTERS)

Joab

My Lord David

David

(TO JEHOSHAPHAT) Did you hear that? I thought I heard
the sly voice of an imposture.

Joab

I've come to speak to you of the spreading disorder
in the land.

David

It is. It is the voice of deception.

Joab

Our enemies have forgotten the David of old. They see
the jealousies between his sons, and think soon Judah
and Israel will break into weak pieces.

David

Listen carefully to what he says. He speaks of one
thing but means something other.

Joab

And the army. The army is divided into two commands.

David

Now it comes to light.

Joab

Benaiah commands the Cherethites and Pelethites as his own troops. How will they fight under the single banner of Judah and Israel?

David

You want to remove my bodyguard? And leave me at the mercy of those who would have their revenge upon me?

Joab

David knows that I am the sword and shield of God's anointed.

David

(GRABS JOAB BY HIS BEARD AND PULLS HIM DOWN TO THE GROUND AT HIS FEET)

Was it not with such beguiling words that you enticed Amasa to his death. "Kiss me my brother. Is it well with thee? (Samuel II, 20.9)"

(DAVID PULLS JOAB BY HIS BEARD UP TO HIS OWN FACE AND KISSES HIM ON THE MOUTH)

With such sweet words you greeted him. And while his lips drank your false love, you thrust your sword into his groin.

(DAVID LETS GO OF JOAB'S BEARD AND PUSHES HIM DOWN. LAUGHS)

Ha. ha. So again you are suspicious that you have a contender has arisen who would take away your command over all the mighty men.

Joab

(GETS UP AND TRIES TO COMPOSE HIMSELF)

My Lord David knows all that I have done for him.

David

Yes. Write this down Jehoshaphat. And David had a nephew Joab, who wished to be David's son. He would do all that David commanded. And more. Much more. For the starved love of an illegitimate bastard has no bounds.

Joab

David knows I have loved him better than any son. Would a son hurl his body before an oncoming spear. Or take upon himself the lead in an attack upon his father's enemies. Or do all that which a king cannot do, but must be done. Would a son protect his father from his sons. Nay! David knows that my strength guards him against his weaknesses.

(BACKGROUND LAUGHTER OF SAUL)

David

That Benjamite is back. Saul has come back to mock me. Hovering and waiting.

(SHOUTS BACK AT THE VOICE)

What are you waiting for?

Joab

(THINKING DAVID'S STILL TALKING TO HIM)

My Lord David. You must know the truth of the situation. The kingdom must have an heir.

David

No. I will not go. I am David, master of all my glory. I am King of Judah and Israel. You can't take away my crown. No one can take away my crown. I am David! David! Only I. Only I know what to whisper into one ear and betray

to another. How to scatter bits of favor about the kingdom and watch the factions fight over the scraps. That's what makes me a great King. I know how to rule.

Saul

(ONLY DAVID HEARS SAUL'S GHOST-LIKE VOICE)

The sword shall never depart from the House of David. Evil. Evil will rise up against him. The sword shall never depart from the House of David.

(VOICE FADES OUT)

David

(SHOUTING AND CRYING)

Away! Away from me! Leave me! Leave me to my regrets and despairs. How cruel you are bursting in upon my despair.

Abishag

David, calm yourself. Let me help you back into bed.

David

He is a coward. They are all cowards. Only cowards dare haunt the guilt of an old man.

Abishag

(WHILE ATTENDING TO DAVID, SHE TURNS TO JOAB)

The King is weary. Overstrained from too much excitement. Another day perhaps. Now it is best to leave him to rest.

(JOAB LEAVES AND IS MET OUTSIDE OF DAVID'S ROOM BY ABIATHAR. LIGHTS DIM ON THE BEDCHAMBER WHILE JOAB AND ABIATHAR TALK OUTSIDE)

Abiathar

Well? What did David say?

Joab

David is possessed with doting obsessions. He is full of reproach and accusation.

Abiathar

You were unable to speak with him?

Joab

He does not speak, but raves against phantoms and ghosts.

Abiathar

Against phantoms and ghosts?

Joab

Yes. The fallen multitudes rise up against him in his thoughts. He imagines them marching upon him and trampling him under their feet. David is beyond the grasp of awareness.

Abiathar

Then what are we to do?

Joab

We will do as I have so often done: protect him from his own recklessness.

Abiathar

This is not a simple matter of keeping David away from the dangers of combat.

Joab

Is it so different. Only now, David battles with the rebellion raging in his soul.

Abiathar

Can you protect him from such a futile struggle?

Joab

We can protect his legacy and keep the kingdom from upheaval. Listen to what I propose. That we prepare a feast to present Adonijah as heir to the throne. And to

this feast we will call together the Elders of Judah and the sons of David's household to say that Joab, Commander of the mighty men of Judah and Israel, and Abiathar, High Priest over the kingdom, stand with Adonijah. This will show that David must also favor Adonijah. And when it is time for the festival of the Lord Yahveh, Adonijah shall stand where David would stand. And he shall receive the blessings of the priests for the bountifulness over the land.

(JOAB AND ABIATHAR EXIT. LIGHTS COME UP ON DAVID'S BEDCHAMBER. DAVID IS SITTING IN HIS CHAIR, ABISHAG SITS AT HIS FEET, AND JEHOSEPHAT IS STANDING IN FRONT OF HIM HOLDING HIS SCROLL)

David

How much more is there to conclude today? I feel myself weakening.

Jehoshaphat

Just a small amount more my Lord David.

(READS FROM THE SCROLL)

"And (Joab) took the crown of Malcom from his head; and it was set on David's head. (Samuel II, 12.30)".

David

I am tired. But too weak to let go of my glory. Glory is a disease that seeps into the bones and spreads through the body coating one's entire being with a putrid layer of hate. Hate comforts the pain. The pain of children who do not love David. But one whom David loved more than all his glory. Is it not written "Now in all Israel there was none to be so praised as Absalom for his beauty; from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. (Samuel II, 14.25&26)". Yes. All who looked upon him loved Absalom.

(FLASHBACK TO ABSALOM'S CHAMBERS. TAMAR IS DANCING IN FRONT OF A MIRROR AS ABSALOM ENTERS)

Tamar

(STOPS DANCING, RUNS AND EMBRACES ABSALOM)

What a marvelous day. Music, dancing, pagantry. Such wonderful fun. Everyone dressed in their brightest colors. The walls of the city covered with banners. The priests all solemn and sanctimonious.

(IMITATES THE SOLEMNITY OF THE PRIESTS)

And all the mighty men marching with their spears pointed at the sky. The people throwing down flowers over our heads. Everything and everyone so friendly and happy. And you standing so straight and tall above the crowd. All the girls sighing with passionate breaths hopelessly stricken with love for Absalom.

(IMITATES GIRLS FAWNING OVER ABSALOM)

But Absalom loves only Tamar. And Tamar is Absalom's handmaiden.

(SHE BOWS BEFORE HIM, GETS UP AND DANCES AROUND HIM)

Is this how the daughters of Jerusalem dance before their lovers?

Absalom

(LAUGHS. JOINS HER IN DANCING. THEY DANCE TOGETHER)

Yes little sister. This is how the daughters of Jerusalem dance before their lovers. And this is how their lovers lift them up and throw them into the air.

(HE LIFTS HER UP, SPINS HER AROUND AND DROPS HER ON THE BED. HE WALKS TO HIS CHAIR AND WATCHES HER LAUGH)

Tamar

I love Jerusalem. It shines like a ruby in the sun. Absalom, when you become king will you give me Jerusalem

as my very own jewel?

Absalom

When I become king, not only will I give you Jerusalem,
but also the sun that shines down upon her.

Tamar

That would be nice. They go so well together.

Absalom

Anything for Tamar.

(SLIGHT PAUSE)

I met a strange man today.

Tamar

Really. What sort of man?

Absalom

A Benjamite.

Tamar

(SURPRISED) A Benjamite? In Jerusalem?

Absalom

He was squatting on the ground and begging.

Tamar

A just reward for a Benjamite.

Absalom

He had fought at Mount Gilboa.

Tamar

(BECOMING BORED WITH THIS CONVERSATION, SHE TRIES TO
CHANGE IT BACK. ABSALOM KEEPS IT UP)

Absalom, do you think father would let us marry?

Absalom

He said many puzzling things. He spoke in parables.

Tamar

You know, it's not uncommon among many nations that royalty should marry from their own family. You know that our mother is the daughter of a King.

Absalom

When I offered to be his friend, he refused me. He asked "Can Absalom protect all the dispossessed of Israel?".

Tamar

Did you know that the Pharaoh, who rules from Sinai to Tripoli, is himself married to his sister. In fact, to both sisters.

Absalom! You're not listening to me!

Absalom

What? What did you say?

Tamar

(COMES OVER AND SITS ON HIS LAP)

What will Absalom give me when he becomes king?

Absalom

He will give you the sunrise and the sunset.

Tamar

That's not enough.

Absalom

He will give you the night and the stars.

Tamar

Still not enough

Absalom

He will give you the day and the years.

Tamar

Better. But still not good enough.

Absalom

He will give you forever.

Tamar

And I will give him honor every moment in return.

Absalom

(STANDS UP DROPPING TAMAR TO THE FLOOR. HE BOWS)

And I will give him honor in return.

(LAUGHS. HELPS HER UP)

Tamar

(PRETENDING BRUISED PRIDE)

You've been making fun of me all this time.

(AMNON ENTERS)

Amnon

Blessings upon you this day.

Absalom

And to you brother.

(WALKS OVER TO AMNON AND PUTS HIS ARM AROUND HIS SHOULDER)

You should have seen our brother battle the Jebusites. He was like Samson of old. A battalion of men all onto himself.

Tamar

(WALKS TO OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM)

Really. It must be his thickness that makes him appear so large.

Absalom

(REBUKING HER) Amnon is almost captain over a company of mighty men.

Amnon

I've come to remind you. Have you forgotten? The King will be conducting the first court in Jerusalem shortly.

Absalom

Yes of course. Today is when we learn which commission each will receive.

(BEGINS LEAVING THE ROOM)

I'm all excited like a child on his birthday.

(EXITS)

Amnon

My little sister is not impressed with battles. Only with triumphs.

Tamar

I don't concern myself with such matters.

Amnon

What does occupy my sister's interest.

Tamar

I'm not interested in answering to anyone. And I'm only your half-sister.

Amnon

(LAUGHS) What a quick temper you have. But your beauty more than makes up for your explosive pride.

Tamar

Surely Amnon has known greater beauties.

Amnon

True

Tamar

(ANGRY) Then go to your beauties.

Amnon

But none with Tamar's fury. (LAUGHS)

Tamar

(TEASES HIM) Does Amnon, therefore, fancy his women as trophies of war?

Amnon

(LAUGHS. BOWS TO TAMAR)

I would gladly surrender myself before beauty.

Tamar

You should be ashamed. Teasing with a sister.

Amnon

A half-sister, who should feel unjust for not accepting the flattery of a brother.

Tamar

Amnon, you're too old for me anyways. Besides, you smell of the fields.

Amnon

(LAUGHS) Of hay you mean. A soldier takes his relaxation where he can find it.

Tamar

Aren't you going to be late for court?

Amnon

May you dismiss all your annoyances with such ease as you dismiss Amnon.

Tamar

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude. You're not so bad. Though you are fiercely rough. Can't you do something with yourself.

Amnon

I will curl my hair in ribbons. And splash sweet perfume on my beard.

Tamar

I don't think that would help. It would make you look like old Abigail bossing the harem around.

(THEY BOTH LAUGH)

I'm sorry I was rude. Blessings upon you this day.

Amnon

My little sister will one day be more than beautiful. She will bloom into loveliness itself.

(BOWS AND EXITS)

Tamar

(GOES TO THE MIRROR AND TALKS INTO IT)

How do the daughters of Jerusalem dance? Let Tamar show you how they dance.

(DANCES AROUND THE ROOM. SCENE OF THE PAST FADES, AND SCENE OF THE PRESENT IN DAVID'S BEDCHAMBER LIGHTS UP)

David

Thus my mind whirls around in painful circles of bitter-sweet memories. And every night I hear her. Every night I hear her mournful cry. We weep the same tears. The tears of Absalom, Absalom and again Absalom. Who is there left to weep for Absalom in all of Jerusalem but us two. A mad old King, and his defiled daughter Tamar afflicted with the curse hanging over the House of David. Beauty

and pride struck down by the vengeance of its own conceit.
 Why? Why are we so endowed with the thirst for love if
 it can never be quenched? All we can ever feel is the
 sense of our own sorrow. Play for me Abishag. Play for
 me a song of sadness and remorse. A lament to the sorrow
 of man.

Abishag

(GOES TO THE HARP AND SINGS)

Oh daughters of solitude
 Who shed bitter tears of sorrow.
 Remember your sister Tamar
 Weeping over all our lost tomorrows.

(SCENE SHIFTS TO OUTSIDE OF DAVID'S ROOM. BENAIAH IS
 DIRECTING HIS GUARDS TO DIFFERENT POSTS. THE GUARDS
 SCURRY OFF AND ON STAGE IN MILITARY FORMATIONS TO TAKE
 UP POSITIONS. ZADOK ENTERS CONFUSED)

Zadok

(TO BENAIAH) What is going on? What has happened?

Benaiah

They have called together the elders of Judah to En-rogel.
 Solomon says to prepare for the worst.

Zadok

That can't be. How do you know.

Benaiah

All of David's sons, except Solomon, have been invited to
 join Adonijah there.

Zadok

This must be Abiathar's doings.

Benaiah

We must take precautionary measures. I'm positioning my

troops to secure the palace.

Zadok

I don't understand why they went to En-rogel?

Benaiah

It lies between the boundaries of Judah and Israel.

Zadok

Yes of course. They mean to reassure Judah of its prominence among the tribes, while appealing to the resentment of Benjamin against David.

(NATHAN ENTERS)

Nathan

(ANGRY) What is the meaning of all these maneuvers?

Benaiah.

Adonijah is preparing treason.

Zadok

Abiathar advises him.

Nathan

What! Impossible! How do you know this?

Zadok

He has gone down to En-rogel to make offerings upon the Serpent's Stone. And he sacrifices seven sheep and seven oxen.

Nathan

The prescribed ritual for consecrating oaths.

Benaiah

Joab is also in his camp.

Nathan

You think, therefore, Adonijah intends to proclaim himself heir to David's kingship?

Benaiah

No. He intends to usurp the throne now without waiting.

Nathan

Why would he do that when his claim is as or more valid

Zadok

Because Abiathar advises him.

Benaiah

And Joab is his consul. He thinks to repeat how he believes he made David king.

Zadok

They are men who harbor deep jealousies against the changing age.

Nathan

And what man should not fear the approaching bewilderment. But that's not what concerns me. Israel and Judah have bled enough because of the arrogance of David's sons. Now Adonijah again dares raise a cup and drink the blood of brother against brother.

Zadok

Nathan. You are the prophet of the Lord Yahveh. Adonijah sins against the Lord Yahveh. Only Solomon is worthy...

Nathan

(INTERRUPTS. ANGRY) Do not take me for a fool. You, with his encouragement, have long conspired to ingratiate yourselves with the court.

Zadok

We are only concerned for the well-being of the kingdom.

Benaiah

What does it matter which contender is more honorable when the issue is authority.

Nathan

Whose authority?

Benaiah

Men of power. Who can rule.

Nathan

Men who merely believe in the power of authority?

Benaiah

Who believe in their strength.

Nathan

To be strong, one must believe in something stronger than oneself. To rule, one must honor that belief.

Benaiah

You speak as someone who has never dealt with the problem of power.

Nathan

And you speak as someone who has never trusted the power of belief.

Zadok

Yet wisdom is the art of knowing when to believe in strength and when to be strong in belief. Solomon has wisdom.

Nathan

So, to rule is no more than a pretense, an art? And from where sprouts this imagination? Does it grow out of Solomon's ambition?

(ZADOK TRIES TO ANSWER, BUT NATHAN CUTS HIM SHORT)

No matter for the moment. I will go and speak with David.

(TAKES A FEW STEPS AWAY, STOPS AND TURNS BACK AROUND)

And I will speak for Solomon. He is stronger in knowledge than Adonijah. Though Israel needs justice more than it needs wit.

(NATHAN ENTERS DAVID'S BEDCHAMBER. ABISHAG BOWS TO HIM. NATHAN APPROACHES DAVID AND BOWS TO HIM)

Nathan

I have an important matter to discuss with you. David. Do you know what is happening in the court? The loyalties of the kingdom are being divided among your mighty men of war. Two camps have sprung up under one roof. Your entire house will fall from the thunder of their thrashing tempest. One camp has already proclaimed Adonijah king whilst David still lives. He himself has gone down to make offerings of sheep and oxen.

What is David's wish? Has this thing been done with the king's indulgence? Without seeking your servant Nathan's advice?

(PAUSE. NO RESPONSE FROM DAVID)

David, it is me Nathan, your consul and advisor, who asks you the meaning of your silence. Angry men are at this very moment drinking toasts to their hatred of you.

(PAUSE. NO RESPONSE)

What bitterness has infected your soul that you delight in tragedy. Your silence condemns the children of Israel to an eternity of suffering. God will never forgive you this crime. You will wallow in the pain of exile. In the darkness of forever. And your sleep will turn into a constant restless wandering through the valley of death crying:

"To thee, O Lord, I call, my rock; do not turn away from me in silence, lest through thy silence I become like those who went down to the Pit.

(from psalm 28)"

(WALKS OVER TO ABISHAG AND LEADS HER TO DAVID)

Did we not find you Abishag to lay with you so that you would again feel the mighty flow of youth? The river of life that is born from virgin springs? David, you who understands the pleasures of existence. Tell us. Tell us how to live.

(BACKGROUND LAUGHTER OF SAUL)

David

(LISTENING TO SAUL'S VOICE)

Again. Again he is coming. Coming to mock me and curse my name.

Nathan

(SHOCKED) My Lord David. How can you accuse me of such a thing?

David

His laughter is roaring in my head. Spinning my brain. I'm falling under the spell of his evil magic.

(A SMALL BRIGHT LIGHT BEGINS TO BE SEEN ON STAGE. DAVID SHADES HIS EYES. NO ONE ELSE SEES IT SINCE ITS A PROJECTION OF DAVID'S DELIRIUM)**

** It may be interesting to attempt the appearance of Saul through rear-view projection methods.

He's coming. He's coming. He who can steal sleep from the dead.

(THE LIGHT GROWS LARGER)

Abishag

Who my Lord? Who is coming?

David

That scurly Benjamite. The son of Kish.

Abishag

Saul? But Saul is long dead.

Nathan

(SHOUT AT DAVID) David! Stop it! You're falling under the spell of your own anguish.

(THE LIGHTS DISAPPEAR LEAVING SAUL STANDING THERE LAUGHING. ONLY DAVID SEES SAUL & SAMUEL. NATHAN AND THE OTHERS WILL CONSIDER DAVID'S RAVING AND DISCUSSIONS WITH THE GHOSTS AS SYMPTOMS OF HIS DETERIORATING MENTAL CONDITIONS)

Saul

It's no use. No use you trying to prevent my beckoning. Just as I could command the ghost of Samuel to be conjured up to me. So I can command myself to be conjured up to you.

David

Away. Away, you are dead. The dead cannot come back to claim their place.

Nathan

David! Do you know what you are doing? It is a sin to summon the dead.

David

He summons me. Tell him. Tell him he profanes the living.

Saul

The sword shall never depart from the House of David. Again it is being raised against you. You will know the suffering of Saul. To be expelled from glory, and your name erased from God's grace.

David

No, no. I am David. And I will have fate obey my commands.

Saul

Cry, That's right cry. As I cried before Samuel. As I cried before his stone heart. He was bitter that his sons were unworthy. And that the people chose me, Saul, to be their king.

Yes. Yes. We should have him join us. It wouldn't be complete without him.

(ANOTHER BRIGHT LIGHT APPEARS AND WHEN IT DISAPPEARS SAMUEL IS STANDING THERE)

Samuel

Again. Again he has brought me forth. Again he will plead before me. And again I will tell him what I have already told him. He is doomed. But he will not accept his judgment.

(LOOKS AND SEES DAVID)

David. David my son. What are you doing here? You are still on the other side.

Saul

That's right. Look upon each other. Then look upon me. See what you have done onto me. You have stolen my crown and cut down all the saplings of my seed.

(SAUL SPRAWLS HIMSELF DOWN ON THE GROUND AT SAMUEL'S FEET)

I am humbled before you. My might has abandoned me. The

Philistines have gathered all their armies at Jezreel. I have fought and battled the enemies of Israel all my days. Each time I vanquish them, they sprout anew like weeds in the garden. My arms are heavy from swinging the sword of vengeance.

Samuel

Why have you disturbed my quiet to bring me up from my grave?

Saul

My strength has departed. And no prophet or dream appears to answer what God would have of me.

Samuel

You have reached your final moment. For tomorrow on Mount Gilboa, you will be delivered into the hands of the Philistines.

Saul

Let my sword pass to the hand of my son....

Samuel

And your sons will fall down from Mount Gilboa. And all your heads will be separated from your bodies and stuck on the wall of Beth-shan. And the kingdom will be rent from your hand and delivered to David.

(SAMUEL TURNS AND FACES DAVID TO BLESS HIM. DAVID KNEELS TO RECEIVE SAMUEL'S BLESSING)

Remember the dream I planted in your brain. And the oath I stamped upon your heart. Great is the glory of the Lord Yahveh. He will have Judah and Israel obey his commandments. You David. You whom I take onto me as my son. You will establish his name in the land. You will vow to make Judah and Israel mighty. And you will see destiny through

my vision.

(BRIGHT LIGHT ENVELOPES SAMUEL AND HE DISAPPEARS)

Saul

To David from the powerful tribe of Judah, he sought to give my kingdom. To the bearer of false oaths he delivered the blessings of anointment.

Do you remember what you swore to me? When we were alone in the cave at En-gedi. You swore to me that you would not "cut off my seed after me." Or "destroy my name out of my father's house (Samuel II, 24.22)." You swore this to me. But when you became mighty, with a vast army and bodyguards, you betrayed that oath. As you betrayed the promises you made to the children of Israel. Seven sons, and sons of sons, you delivered into my enemies hands. Seven who were too young to fall at Mount Gilboa you delivered to my enemies. To be stabbed through their hearts with stakes, and stuck in front of my house at Gibeah. To shame me before Israel. One crippled remnant you let live to show how kind you are. And now I Saul, whom the people lifted up to be their king, must drift in empty memories.

David

You did not know how to be king. You thought it just a matter of robbing your enemies and distributing the spoils among the tribes.

Saul

I protected my people. The people loved me. They stole my body from of the walls of Beth-shan to bury it.

David

But I brought your bones to rest at Zela. And buried them in your father's grave.

Saul

Only to show Judah and Israel that there was nothing left of Saul.

(LIKE AN ECHO HE REPEATS THIS LINE)

Nothing left of Saul. Nothing left of Saul.

David

You did not know how to be king. All that which I have done was so to make a nation out of these wretched Hittite tribes, the descendents of Jacob.

Saul

(LAUGHS) How noble you are. So noble that you quake in the shadow of death. What can be more touching than to see the great David tremble in fear. Let me comfort you with a song. One that you yourself composed. Remember how you used to sing to me to quiet my fitful soul. Now I will sing for you.

"You love evil more than good,
and lying more than speaking the truth.
You loved all words that devour,
O deceitful tongue.
Therefore God will destroy you forever;
he will snatch and tear you from your tent;
he will uproot you from the land of the living.
(from psalm 52)"

David

(SHOUTING) David lives, and lives and lives forever!

Nathan

David be calmed. You must compose yourself. The nation waits for you to proclaim your heir. You have a duty yet

to fulfill.

David

No. He will not take pleasure mocking me. I will have the last word over him.

(DEFIANTLY SHOUTS AT SAUL)

I am David. King of Judah and Israel. Anointed of God. Conqueror of Jerusalem. And you. You are Saul, the mad mountain chieftan who chases after trinkets.

Saul

(LAUGHS) You were always skilled at flapping your pride. But what good is it to you now. Here you stand naked and exposed for what you are and always were; a thief. How does a rogue face up to his death? He thinks he can cheat it.

David

I am David, who defeated all the enemies of Judah and Israel in battle. Who drove the Philistines back across their sea. Who destroyed Moab. And chased the Syrians back to Damascus. And set up garrisons over Edon and Amalek.

Saul

Yet who can't tolerate the feeling of pain. Come David. Let me teach you. Let me teach you how to die. How it was done on Mount Gilboa.

(SAUL STABS HIMSELF THROUGH WITH HIS SWORD. THE BRIGHT LIGHT RETURNS TO ENVELOPE HIM, AND HE DISAPPEARS)

David

(SLUMPS TO THE GROUND, MOURNFULLY)

"Ye daughter of Israel, weep over Saul,
Who clothed you in scarlet. (Samuel II, 2.24)."

(ABISHAG WALKS OVER AND HELPS DAVID UP. HE LETS HIMSELF BE LIFTED TO HIS CHAIR)

I slip into a trance that carries me off into self-pity.
Visions of ambivalence remind me of my failures.

Nathan

My Lord David. I implore you to declare your heir. The memory of your glory depends upon it. Matters have reached a desperate situation. The land will be torn into ruins.

David

Such is the way of glory. Legends are built upon the myths that hides their blood-soaked deeds.

Nathan

It would be a crime against God to make the people suffer yet more war and rebellion.

David

I endure the memories of all my suffering. The king suffers as only a king must.

Nathan

What is it my Lord? What is it that troubles you so cruelly?

David

It is the cruelty of everything. Everything we see and touch but cannot feel.

(RAISES HIS ARM TO ABISHAG. SHE COMES AND KNEELS AT HIS FEET)

Like the fullness of these swollen breasts that ripen into womanhood, but will never suckle happiness. There is no such thing as happiness for the son of man.

Abishag

(SHE HOLDS UP HER BREASTS)

My breasts are meant to bring joy to the king.

David

Or your pearl smooth skin that glistens in the dark but will soon turn to gray flakes and fall into dust.

Abishag

(SLIGHT PAINED CRY)

The king searches too deeply into the midst of misery.

David

And your silky soft hair flowing freely in the wind that will grow into rope and become caught in the snarls of heaven.

Abishag

Your words hurt me.

David

I need company in the loneliness of my suffering.

Abishag

(CRYING) I am your handmaiden.

Nathan

Can nothing move to pity a soul defeated by despair.
David. David. "All the eyes of Israel are upon thee, that thou shouldest tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. (King I, 1.20)."

David

(STAND UP AND SHOUTS IN A MAD OUTBURST OF PERPLEXITY)

Absalom! Absalom! Why!? Why have you turned against me!?
Wouldn't I gladly give you half my kingdom, all my kingdom, the entire world if it were mine to give.

Absalom. My son Absalom. Why have you turned against me?

END OF ACT I

ACT II

(DAVID'S BEDCHAMBER. ABISHAG IS PLAYING DAVID'S HARP.
DAVID IS SEATED IN HIS CHAIR)

Abishag

(SINGING)

The nights turn into endless days,
And days slip by into distant nights.
While all the mighty have lost their way,
In the promised land of the Israelites.

David

Night is again upon us. And all my thoughts will revert
back into eternal questions. Answers and questions pass
each other in the darkness like caravans in the vast desert
of doubt. Sometimes they pass so close that they almost
touch. But in the darkness of confusion, they fail to
recognize each others nearness. And in that infinitely
small gap, man must forever wander in fear and blindness.
When you cannot see, what can it matter how close the shore
may be.

I once heard the story of a king who had two virtuous sons.
When he became old, he made them both equal rulers over his
kingdom. Each ruled according to his own temperament. One
was wise, and the other was good. But the kingdom did not
prosper. The people came and pleaded for the old king to
return. He answered them, you have wisdom and goodness.
Why do you need me back? They answered him in return. Your
wise son only speaks in riddles. And your good son only
speaks in proverbs. Between them, we can never learn when
we must plant our crops.

So it seems with all of life. Half of the world is absorbed
only with questions. And the other half, only with answers.

(SCENE TURNS TO THE COURT ROOM. BENAI AH AND ZADOK ARE
TALKING)

Zadok

Even the prophet Nathan has spoken to David. Nothing has yet shaken him out of his foul mood.

Benaiah

We are in control of the palace. And as long as David does not interfere, Adonijah cannot re-enter to retrieve the crown.

Zadok

What if David does intervene? And even proclaims in favor of Adonijah?

Benaiah

Then the cleverness of Solomon will be put to its severest test.

(NATHAN AND BATH-SHEBA ENTER ROOM FROM THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION DISCUSSING THE SITUATION)

Nathan

Don't fear. Solomon shall yet be king. We will make it come to pass.

Bath-sheba

Even against the will of Joab and the mighty men of Judah, who are at this very moment conspiring with Adonijah?

Nathan

The word of David is still greatly feared.

Bath-sheba

David is a man who has lost his soul, but whose body remains behind to mourn its passing.

Nathan

He is still God's anointed. On that we must rely to have

David remember his duty to Judah and Israel. And to the Lord Yahveh.

Bath-sheba

Will the black clouds ever clear from his mind?

Nathan

We will make him see through the very darkness of his dejected spirit.

(BENAI AH AND ZADOK JOIN NATHAN AND BATH-SHEBA)

Zadok

What will the day bring Nathan? Can you foretell our fates?

Nathan

Without belief it will surely bring defeat.

Benaiah

Belief in what? The capriciousness of a mad king?

Nathan

The king is afflicted with some deep guilt. Where there is still the feeling of guilt, there is yet hope.

Zadok

But what is it for which David seeks penitence?

Benaiah

If, indeed, he does feel remorse.

Nathan

He yearns for the love of a son. Solomon must give to him that love he craves. Solomon must come down from his lofty pedestal, and bow his head down to David as a devoted son. Not as just another self-seeking prince, but as a dutiful

and pious child. A child that adores his father above the wonders of his splendor. That loves him for the pitiful child of God that he is. Solomon must love David as his father.

(SCENE SHIFTS BACK TO DAVID'S BEDCHAMBER. JEHOSEPHAT ENTERS)

David

Not much time left Jehoshaphat. Not much time to conclude the accounts of David's glory. Soon the cruelty of life will overtake me. Many are waiting on both sides of existence to undo my fame and shame my honor.

Honor. What is David's honor? to die without the love of sons.

Where? Where were we?

Jehoshaphat

(OPENS HIS SCROLL AND READS)

"And David took the shield of gold....

And brought them to Jerusalem. (Samuel II, 8.7)."

David

Yes. I remember. To Jerusalem. All my glory I brought to Jerusalem, the city I Proclaimed to be my holy city. The city where I would establish my house forever; and it would be passed down like a crown from King to King born out of my seed. I remember the first court I held in Jerusalem, and the honor I desired to bring to the House of David.

(FLASHBACK TO THE PAST. DAVID IS SEATED ON THE THRONE. THE COURT IS ASSEMBLED AROUND HIM)

Jehoshaphat

(READING FROM A SCROLL)

Let all the mighty men of Judah and Israel be assembled and hear the word of David, God's anointed. So shall it be inscribed into the Book of Life:

"And David reigned over all of Israel" and Judah.

"And David executed justice and righteousness unto all his people. (Samuel II, 8.15)."

David

I have long waited to announce my desire to see built a house of cedar where the Ark of God may dwell forever.

Nathan

(EMERGES OUT OF THE COURT AND APPROACHES DAVID)

Nay, my Lord David. The God Yahveh will not have David build him his house forever. David already has more glory than any man who ever was. And David's glory will yet grow greater and greater. But to build a house of cedar for the Lord Yahveh would give David absolute glory. And such glory corrupts reverence for both God and man.

David

The people want and need a temple of the Lord Yahveh.

Nathan

The Lord Yahveh will establish the house of David forever. And the seed of David shall build a house of cedar for the Lord Yahveh forever.

David

I bow before the wisdom of Nathan.

(DAVID BOWS AND NATHAN RETURNS TO HIS PLACE)

Now I want to give honors to my sons Amnon and Absalom. For no two finer sons are there onto any man.

(AMNON AND ABSALOM APPROACH THE THRONE. DAVID STANDS UP TO ANNOUNCE HIS REWARDS TO HIS SONS)

To Amnon, my first born, conceived at Hebron where our father Abraham set down his tent, I commission him to be captain over a legion of mighty men. He will wear my armor

on his chest to protect his safety as it has guarded David from harm.

(SERVANT BRINGS OUT THE ARMOR AND AMNON PUTS IT ON. A HURRAH GOES UP FROM THE COURT)

To Absalom, whose gentle eyes smile upon a father's joy.
I proclaim him Prince of Jerusalem.

(AN EXPRESSION OF ASTONISHMENT ESCAPES FROM THE COURT)

For his fair features are suited to the beauty of this city.
He will wear my robe to show the people David's glory.

(DAVID REMOVES HIS ROBE AND PUTS IT AROUND ABSALOM. A MORE ENTHUSIASTIC HURRAH GOES UP FROM THE COURT. ABSALOM AND AMNON WALK BACK TO THEIR PREVIOUS PLACES)

Although Judah and Israel are strong, there are still many enemies at our gate. We must make plans for defense. What is the state of our force?

Joab

My Lord David, although we have thrown out Moab and Aram, our forces are divided on two fronts. To secure our victories we needed to establish a line of garrisons along the north and east. This has strained our resources. We do not have sufficient reserves.

Seraiah

The cost of maintaining permanent garrisons is draining our treasury. And the pattern of small farms and orchards does not produce enough surplus for mounting further campaigns.

David

Then we will demand a larger contribution from each tribe.

Seraiah

We can't rely upon the tribes to collect enough for what we

would need. And, many are reluctant to lavish donations to the glory of David.

David

Then we must do as Moses did. Put men in charge over tens, then hundreds, then thousands. And these men will be loyal to David. Next we will organize the land into estates and districts, with scribes assigned to each to keep account for every dunam of harvest,

Absalom

(STEPS FORWARD. MURMURS ESCAPE FROM THE COURT)

But my Lord David. Wouldn't that arouse the resentment of the people towards the king.

David

Absalom? You do not approve of such a plan?

Absalom

I'm only asking what its results will mean.

David

It will mean that Judah and Israel are to become a strong nation as other strong nations.

Absalom

Yet perhaps such strength may turn into weakness. For you may change the hearts of men into hate and anger.

David

(GETTING ANGRY WITH ABSALOM)

Then these hearts will fight with no fear of death.

Absalom

But also with no joy for victory.

David

Enough Absalom. I have decided. So will it be.

(DAVID LEAVES. THE COURT FOLLOWS LEAVING IN SMALL GROUPS DISCUSSING DAVID'S DECISION. AMNON REMAINS AFTER EVERYONE HAS GONE)

Amnon

What kind of perverse love is it to show favor for one son over another. Haven't I shed blood for David's glory? And haven't I spent my youth away, in service of a father who never had time to comfort a son through his frightened dreams. Living in caves and eating the dust of the desert. Hiding on narrow mountain ridges waiting forever to surprise one or another of David's enemies. My father knows me not. I'm but another sword in his hand. Not a son, but a weapon.

(JONADAB COMES FORWARD FROM THE REAR OF THE STAGE)

Jonadab

My Lord Amnon did not receive suitable honor today.

Amnon

(SEARCHES AROUND AND NOTICES JONADAB)

What? What's that? Oh, it's you Jonadab.

Jonadab

I suffer for my friend Amnon. He deserves far greater tribute.

Amnon

What do you mean? I was made captain of a legion.

Jonadab

But Absalom was made heir to David's crown.

Amnon

(SHOUTS) You lie! He wasn't given anything. Just a title for ceremonies.

Jonadab

Then why does my Lord Amnon brood in a dark corner?

Amnon

I was not brooding.

Jonadab

Of course not. He is happy that Absalom will be King.

Amnon

(GRABS JONADAB BY THE FRONT OF HIS SHIRT)

Listen. Though you're my friend and cousin, I'll crumple your brain into bits of bone, if you say I am less to my father than any son.

(SHOVES JONADAB BACK)

Jonadab

Then it must be Absalom who has tricked the king into giving him his blessing. Like Jacob did to Esau.

Amnon

Yes Absalom. The pretty face that turns the heads of every glance his direction.

Jonadab

And now that he will remain in court while Amnon is sent to battle, he will remind everyone that he is David's son. And Amnon will be off in the far forgotten regions of the mind.

Amnon

With his thick locks of hair hanging like rich clusters of dark purple grapes.

Jonadab

Absalom will parade his pride each day before the gates of Jerusalem, while Amnon is trudging through the hell of war.

Amnon

Absalom who can woo the love of men with his maiden eyes.

Jonadab

Yes. Absalom has played cruelly upon the weaknesses of David. You must put him to shame. So he cannot again show his face before the court.

Amnon

I will cast him out of my father's heart. But how? How do you shame an oblivious conceit?

Jonadab

To shame someone you have to abuse their weakness.

Amnon

Yes, yes. You're right. How clear one sees when he is full of hate.

Jonadab :

Not hate. But justice.

Amnon

Yes. In the name of justice evil itself becomes holy.

Jonadab

What is Absalom's weakness?

Amnon

The vain do not allow themselves weaknesses.

Jonadab

I know! His sister Tamar!

Amnon

(SURPRISED) Tamar!?

Jonadab

Yes, of course. It's widely rumored that Absalom and Tamar act indecently in each others company.

Amnon

What are you saying?

Jonadab

It's perfect. It would shame Absalom, and he would have to hide his face from David's eyes.

Amnon

What would so shame him?

Jonadab

Why if you were to do with Tamar what you will.

Amnon

(SHOCKED) You are vile! Is that what makes villiany so indispensable? It dares exploit the most fiendish instincts buried deep inside our primordial emotions.

Jonadab

Once you have had your fill of exquisite vindictiveness, you push her out and bolt the door behind her.

Amnon

Are all great events traceable to such wickedness?

Jonadab

Where can she turn but to Absalom? And though no one may know what befell Tamar, Absalom will carry the burden of her disgrace in his soul. And its weight will drag him down into self-defeat.

Amnon

But what if what I would do becomes known? And the shame

turns upon me?

Jonadab

What shame? You behaved as a man provoked by a temptress. But more important. All attention would become focused upon the cuckold Absalom. And his inability to face his shame would expose his impotence. How can such a man be King everyone would ask. And David, to stop the gossip, would give Tamar to you for a wife. It's a common practice among many nations. And if David so wills it, so will it be.

Amnon

Oh, what a blanket of perjury we must stitch together to appease our bleeding pride. How much simpler it would be for my father to love me. I'm a grown man who longs for a loving smile from his father's lips. What must a son do to win his father's affection? How wicked must he become before his father notices his son's tears. We shall see. We shall see. For Amnon will test the limits of a father's love.

(SCENE OF THE PAST BLACKS OUT. AND THE PRESENT IN DAVID'S BEDCHAMBER REAPPEARS)

Jehoshaphat

"And David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it. (Samuel II, 12.29)."

David

All the splendor of my glory I bestowed on my city Jerusalem. And the land was at peace. Judah and Israel were finally one. At peace. For seven years Israel and Judah fought. Their loyalties divided between the House of David and the House of Saul. The love of Israel for Saul was

strong. Too strong. It kept threatening peace. What didn't I have to do to crush that love and protect the peace of Judah and Israel. First I had to conspire with Abner to betray Ish-bosheth, Saul's son. And then pretend grief when Joab ambushed Abner. And then invent some pretext to hand over Saul's descendents to the Gibeonites. But still there was no peace. For David was so busy establishing peace over the land, that he neglected the peace over his household.

Such is the story of David's glory. But that is not what Jehoshaphat will write into the book of life. No. He will tell of David's triumphs, and songs, and devotion to the Lord Yahveh. And of David's great loves.

(PICKS UP HIS HEAD AS IF HE HEARS SOMETHING OUTSIDE)

Something is occurring in the palace. Look out the window Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat

(JEHOSHAPHAT LOOKS OUT THE WINDOW)

There are soldiers running to different posts. It must be some sort of alert.

David

One needs to always be on alert. Defenders must live in an uproar of readiness. It is a condition of life. That is how I've survived. Nothing is above suspicion. Everything is fluid. Today we have impunity. But tomorrow the whole universe will hold us in contempt.

(TAMAR BURSTS INTO DAVID'S ROOM IN A CRAZED FIT)

Tamar

Absalom, Absalom where are you? Have you not heard? Have you not heard what is happening in Jerusalem?

Abishag

(ABISHAG GOES TO TAMAR AND TRIES TO CALM HER)

My lady, please. You are distressed. And you will upset the king.

Tamar

Evil. Evil demons stalk through the streets. They plan to steal your crown. I heard them. I heard their evil plots to steal your crown.

(ABISHAG TRIES TO LEAD TAMAR OUT OF THE ROOM. BUT TAMAR BREAKS AWAY. ABISHAG LEAVES HER ALONE)

Why? Why did you leave me? Why did you leave your sister Tamar? You promised to take me with you. Oh Absalom. My heart sinks into despair when you hide your beauty from me.

David

What have I done to bring such ruin upon my house? Tamar, the daughter of my affliction. If I could but bring the joy of wonderment back into your heart.

Tamar

(WALKS TO THE MIRROR AND LOOKS INTO IT)

There you are. I recognize your eyes. You can't disguise them behind that women's masquerade.

(TOUCHES THE MIRROR WITH HER FINGER TIPS)

I can feel your presence, but you're still so far away. Come back. Come back to me on my side of this illusion.

(SINKS TO THE FLOOR)

You can't come back can you. I know all about it.

Don't think I'm still that foolish child that you once teased with your silly games. You're dead. Dead. Stuck by your throat in the fork of an olive tree. Anointed by green oil still ripening on the branch.

(GETS UP OFF THE FLOOR)

I know. I'll ask King David our father. He'll bring you back. He is king over all of Judah and Israel. Master of all the mighty men. What can't the mighty do if they so wish. They can conquer worlds, plunder cities, devour the weak. They can even sacrifice their children to the God of their own glory.

(FLASHBACK SCENE IN ABSALOM'S ROOM EMERGES SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH THE PRESENT)

Absalom, my Prince of Jerusalem. Your beauty smiles in the sunset shining down upon the golden city.

(THE SCENE OF THE PRESENT FADES COMPLETELY. AND THE PAST TAKES OVER. ABSALOM IS SITTING ON A CHAIR. SHEBA IS STANDING BEFORE HIM)

Absalom

Tell me Sheba. Tell me about the people of Israel.

Sheba

Ah, they're not worth knowing. They're mostly like me: tricky.

Absalom

To what are they loyal?

Sheba

Only to themselves. And to King David, of course.

Absalom

Of course.

Sheba

Though they're not really good at observing loyalty.

Absalom

Is that so? What are they good at?

Sheba

Rebellion. But don't tell them I told you. They don't like sharing this gift with others.

Absalom

What is their favorite grievance?

Sheba

You name it, and they'll denounce it.

Absalom

Are they still loyal to Saul?

Sheba

Ah that Benjamite dog. Who was ever loyal to him? Even David deserted him.

Absalom

You have a clever way of balancing on top of an ironic point.

Sheba

I'm not clever at all my Lord Absalom. I only have an uncontrollable tongue.

Absalom

What would happen if a census was taken of Israel.

Sheba

What good would it do? They have nothing left.

Absalom

The king needs to know what is in the land.

Sheba

Then God will punish David for trying to measure his generosity. Like the beggar who curses charity, so David

scorns God's blessings. For God's greatest blessing is his people.

Absalom

I see you are a true child of Israel: easily aroused by injustice.

Sheba

I am a pitiful child of God: torn apart between my hopes and God's disappointments.

(TAMAR BURSTS INTO THE ROOM. HER CLOTHING IS TORN AND HER APPEARANCE IS WILD. SHE IS COVERED WITH DUST)

Tamar

(CRYING AND IN HYSTERICS)

Absalom, Absalom. Help me, help me.

(SHE COLLAPSES AFTER TAKING A FEW STEPS INTO THE ROOM. ABSALOM AND SHEBA LIFT HER UP AND CARRY HER TO THE BED. ABSALOM TRIES TO CALM HER, AT THE SAME TIME, QUESTIONS HER TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED)

Absalom

What has befallen you? Who or what has done this?

Tamar

Absalom, Absalom. Help me, help me.

Absalom

What is it Tamar? What has happened?

Tamar

The demons have escaped from their chains.

Absalom

What demons? What chains? What is it?

Tamar

Tamar is in ruins. The demons captured her and dragged her

through the torture of shame.

Absalom

Tell Absalom who these demons are. He will punish them.
I will chase them even into hell and crush them with my
vengeance.

Tamar

No no! Absalom stay with me. Don't leave me. Don't leave
me.

Absalom

Shsh Tamar. I'm here. Don't be frightened. I won't leave
you. But you must tell me what happened.

Tamar

They are after us. Everywhere looking to find us.
Absalom, they want to destroy my Absalom. They want to
destroy my Absalom.

Absalom

No one is going to harm us. I'll protect you. And no one
will harm me. I'll have my servants guard the gate.

Tamar

You don't know them. Their hate can poison the earth.
And everything will die. We will die.

Absalom

No Tamar. They can't get in here. We can defeat them.
But you must tell me who they are.

Tamar

Tamar is in ruins. I cover my head with ashes of mourning.
Mourn for me. Mourn for Tamar turned into ruins.

Absalom

You are safe. Safe in my house. You're with Absalom.
Your brother Absalom.

Tamar

(JUMPS OUT OF BED AND STARTS RUNNING AROUND THE ROOM)

Mourn for Tamar. All of Jerusalem will mourn for Tamar.

(SHE BEGINS TEARING AT HER CLOTHS)

Tear your cloths in mourning for Tamar. Tear your hearts
in mourning for Tamar. Tear your souls in mourning for
Tamar. For Tamar has been turned into ruins.

(ABSALOM CATCHES HER AND TRIES TO LEAD HER BACK TO THE
BED. SHE BREAKS AWAY AND RUNS TO THE WINDOW. SHE SHOUTS
OUTSIDE)

Weep. Weep Oh Jerusalem for your daughter Tamar. Mourn
for her in your dark passages and blind alleys. In your
hidden corners and secret lairs. Weep for me maidens of
Zion. For your sister Tamar, desecrated and turned into
ruins.

Absalom

(CATCHES HER AND SHAKES HER)

Who? Who has desecrated you?

Tamar

I am shamed before your eyes.

I have been defiled. (CRIES)

(LETS HERSELF BE LED BACK TO THE BED)

Absalom

Shsh, be comforted. Let me quiet your grief. You know
Absalom can do magic. Hasn't he always been able to
make Tamar smile and feel joy.

Tamar

Absalom, I am shamed.

Absalom

Then I too will suffer your sorrow and cover my head with ashes.

Tamar

No! No! You musn't! That's what he wants. To see Absalom shamed before the court.

Absalom

Who wishes such a thing? Who? Is it... Is it....
Amnon? Yes, that's who it is, isn't it? Isn't it? It was him. What did he do? Tell me what he did?

Tamar

No Absalom, don't fall into his trap.

Absalom

(STANDS UP AND DEMANDS TO BE TOLD

What has he done to cause us shame?

(TAMAR WHIMPERS, BUT DOESN'T ANSWER. ABSALOM SITS BACK DOWN ON THE BED AND SHAKES HER BY HER SHOULDERS DEMANDING TO BE TOLD WHAT OCCURED)

Tell me! I command you to tell me! What did he do to cause us shame? I want to know every account of his crime. I want to know in how many ways I must hate him. Tell me! Tell me!

Tamar

(IN A WEAK VOICE, TRYING TO AVOID LOOKING AT ABSALOM)

He forced....He forced me to...to...lay with him. He pretended to be ill, and convinced the king to send me to him. To prepare delicacies for him to eat. When I arrived, he sent away all his servants. He began to speak lewd

things about us. And said he too is a brother of Tamar and a son of David. I didn't know what he meant or what he would do. He became angry and began to shout and cry as if in pain. Through his mad ranting I saw he was possessed of hate. He caught hold of me and threw me onto his bed. But then he stopped for a moment. I was frightened. He waited, murmuring strange sounds under his breath. Repeating to himself "We shall see. We shall see. Fathers beget sons. Sons beget fathers." And as if having fallen under the spell of his own words, his eyes rolled, and his mouth quivered, and his body shivered in uncontrollable trembling. Suddenly his frame was on top of me like a mountain pressing down on air. I lay there still as a silent breeze swept along before a raging storm, waiting....waiting for the crashing waves to fall dead once they had spent their fury.

And when he had finished doing what he would with me, he calmly lay back, stared up at the ceiling and called his servant saying "Remove this strumpet from my presence and bolt the door after her."

(PAUSE) I stood outside his door waiting. Waiting for my evil dream to end. For the filth to fall from my body. For the earth to open and swallow me up. But nothing happened. And I knew. I knew what shame was.

Absalom

Tamar has no shame. She is the handmaiden of the sun shining down upon Jerusalem. The most beloved daughter of Judah and Israel. And the delight of her Absalom.

(ABSALOM PUTS HER TO BED. HE WALKS BACK TO HIS CHAIR. TALKS TO HIMSELF)

What has happened to the hearts of men? What has so shaken their very being to cause them to act so loathsome and cruel?

Has a plague of evil swept across the land? Infecting the blood that runs to the brain blinding the vision of compassion? If son, then I also have been bitten by the sting of hate. I can become more evil than Amnon. He's a coward. Only cowards feel the fear of shame. He thought he could shame me. But I'm no coward like him.

Sheba

My friend Absalom, listen to me. Don't behave in such a way to show your pain. For then you will for sure go down in self-defeat.

Absalom

My anger must have its rage. And my hate must have its vengeance.

Sheba

But why is your anger and hate any more privileged than any mere slave's. And why is your pain more honorable than his suffering.

Absalom

Because I am Absalom. And there is no other Absalom to feel what I feel, and endure what I endure.

Sheba

How can the hurt feelings of the son of David be compared against the agonies of Israel.

Absalom

What do my sorrows have to do with their sorrows?

Sheba

Indeed, what do they have to do with each other? (SHOUTS)
I'll tell you what they have to do with each other. When David wishes to give honor to his glory, he bleeds the

price of his vanity from the flesh of Israel. For the sake of the glory of David's kingdom, Israel is put under the yoke of tyranny. How is it now different than when the Philistines came and plundered our houses and murdered our sons? Did Israel ask to become a mighty kingdom? No! She pleaded before Samuel to give her a King so she may have a protector to guard over her children. But David does not watch over Israel. Instead he takes onto himself whatever he deems necessary for his glory, and his greed covets. He has turned Israel into a nation of beggars. So also David's sons take and do whatever their pride so pleases them. And Israel will again suffer the destructive aftermath resulting from the ambition and corruption flowing out of the House of David.

Absalom

But I have done no wrong to Israel.

Sheba

You weep for yourself and not over the suffering of Israel. Didn't you today tell me that David is planning to take a census of the land. How is that less of a crime than the defilement of your sister Tamar? And when I asked you can Absalom protect the dispossessed of Israel, you thought I was spreading salt on your honor. And now that you see that what has befallen Israel can befall you, you try to deny the sorrows of Israel.

Absalom

(SHOUTS BACK) Then I take it all upon myself. All the hate and anger and sorrow of Israel I take onto myself. For today Israel itself has been raped, and justice has been ravaged.

I will take my revenge upon all the evil that has ravaged my heart. I will take my revenge upon all the demons that

crawl over the surface of the earth. I will take my revenge on the House of David from where cruelty spreads across the land. The very House of David that conspired in this crime of shame.

And I will have my revenge on the very plague that possesses the souls of men.

(THE SCENE OF THE PAST BLACKS OUT, AND THE SCENE OF THE PRESENT ON DAVID'S ROOM LIGHTS UP)

Tamar

Absalom, Absalom. Why did you leave me? Why did you leave your sister Tamar? There is no joy left in Jerusalem. The stones have turned into muted rust dripping ashes of mourning. And the valleys echo my grief. See what they have done to me. How can you just lie there in your grave and do nothing.

How can you sleep immortal sleep when your bride has been violated.

David

(DAVID GOES TO COMFORT HER)

Tamar, sweet child....

Tamar

(SHE RUNS AWAY FROM HIM)

Murderer! Demon! Help! Help! I've been attacked! Ravaged! David's daughter has been pillaged! Her purity ruined!

Evil! Evil stalks me! Chasing me into madness!

(SHE EXITS RANTING)

Evil! Evil stalks me!

David

(SITS BACK DOWN ON HIS CHAIR)

Such. Such is the work of David's glory.

Abishag

(APPROACHES DAVID)

My Lord David, what will happen to me when it will be over. When David has gone to sleep with his father, and your son is King. What will happen to me Abishag, the last. The very last of David's handmaidens.

David

You. You will live in solitude. For no man can claim you without also making a claim upon David's glory.

Abishag

Must I remain an unturned page in the story of David's glory.

David

You are like the singular lonely flower that blooms but for an hour after the one day of rain that falls in the desert. And in that one hour, it will know all the life it will ever know. Then it must drop its petals and wait for its stem to wither away. I am the last rain that will ever fall upon you.

Abishag

But I have not yet bloomed.

David

One should never trust the desert to keep its commitments.

Abishag

(SLIGHT CRY) My Lord David would have me wither away on the sands of an hour glass.

David

Come Abishag, don't cry. Tears have salt that burns the open wounds of woe.

You will be well cared for through your everlasting virgin perpetuity. For you will remain as a testimony to my cruel glory.

Abishag

What can compensate me for the sacrifice of my wasted womanhood.

David

Nothing. Nothing can compensate us for our wasted lives. You. You and Tamar will remain to wail the remorseful song of David's flawed soul. Of how he wasted the hopes and dreams of the children of Israel. And your unconsummated life will be a reminder of David's sterile promises.

(NATHAN, BATH-SHEBA AND ZADOK ENTER DAVID'S ROOM)

Nathan

My Lord David. We have come to beseech you. To beg of you to hear our pleas so you may see the dangers that are gathering against David's splendor and glory.

Bath-sheba

(KNEELS BEFORE DAVID)

"Behold Adonijah reigneth; and thou my lord the King knowest it not. (King I, 1.18)."

Nathan

He has sacrificed sheep and oxen before all of David's sons whom he has gathered together to witness his coronation.

Bath-sheba

"But Solomon thy servant hath he not called. (King I, 1.19)"
He knows. He knows that Solomon loves David and will bow only before him whom David chooses to be king.

Zadok

Abiathar, the High Priest, advises Adonijah.

Nathan

My Lord David. Adonijah has sinned against his father. He has asked for Abishag for a wife to show that what is David's, now will be his. As Absalom once entered the chambers of David's concubines to shame David before Judah and Israel, so Adonijah would shame his father David.

David

Yet such shame is nothing compared to the sorrow of losing a son.

Bath-sheba

Your son Solomon loves you.

Nathan

He is waiting in simple unadornment to receive his father's blessings. Such is the way of a loving son.

David

Always. Always too occupied with being David, God's anointed.

Nathan

The Lord Yahveh has chosen you to make a great nation out of Judah and Israel.

David

And for the sake of that greatness David must close his heart to his son. Why? Why has Absalom turned upon me!?

Nathan

Absalom is no more. For he sought his own glory. The glory of vanity.

David

But what greater glory could there have been than to be king with David's blessings.

Nathan

Absalom had no vision of the greatness of the Lord Yahveh. He was mad with the thirst for revenge. And when he would have finished bleeding those he thought wronged him, he would bleed those who offended his madness. Soon he would have bled all of Israel to make it feel his pain and anger.

David

His pain stabs me through my father's heart. Why is it forbidden for me to feel his torment.

Nathan

David is protector of the glory of the Lord Yahveh. Solomon, who loves his father, also loves the Lord Yahveh.

(SIMULTANEOUS APPEARANCE OF SCENE FROM THE PAST LIGHTS UP. JOAB IS STANDING IN AN OPEN FIELD WITH A SWORD IN HIS HAND. DAVID, WHO IS STILL IN THE PRESENT, WILL CONDUCT DISCUSSIONS WITH THE VOICES OF THE PAST)

Joab

Absalom came with forces from Judah out of Hebron in the South. And Sheba came with forces from Israel out of Gibeon in the North. I don't think they'll follow right away. They'll be too flush with self-congratulation when they reach Jerusalem and find it empty. That'll give us our chance to regroup on the other side of the Jordan.

Nathan

(IN THE PRESENT)

David. Remember how you yearned to build a temple to the Lord Yahveh? Solomon shall build you that temple.

Bath-sheba

You promised. When my baby died, you promised. Would you condemn all my children to death? For surely Adonijah will count Solomon among his enemies.

Joab

(IN THE PAST)

The spies you planted in their camp will get word to us when they plan to make their pursuit. We will be ready to surprise them in the forest of Ephraim.

(IN THE SCENE OF THE PAST, SHIMEI APPEARS ON A HILL AND BEGINS THROWING STONES AT DAVID IN THE PRESENT. THE OTHER CHARACTERS IN THE PRESENT DO NOT SEE ANY OF THIS OCCURRING)

Shimei

Go on, go on. Get away while you can. Get out of this land.

Joab

Who is that lunatic who dares hurl such insults?

David

(IN THE PRESENT)

That's Shimei, a Benjamite from the family of Saul's father.

Nathan

David. Hear us. Listen to voices of the present. The voices of the past are beyond our reckoning.

Shimei

How does it feel? How does it feel to be driven out? The great David running like the thief that he is. Running away. The land has had enough. Enough of the blood from the House of Saul. And now she vomits you, David, out of her belly. No more. No more will she have to drink the blood of Saul's house.

Joab

Let me cut off his tongue.

David

No! Let him curse. How ridiculous it would be to stop this Benjamite who is my sworn enemy from cursing me, when my own son would kill me if he could.

Nathan

Enough David! Enough! Stop running away into madness. Your place is here in the present.

Shimei

So away. Begone. Go on you blood thirsty villain. Take yourself and all the misery you have brought upon the land and begone. Yes, the Lord has delivered us from your murderous hands. Praised be his name. And praised be the name of Absalom who has done the work of God's vengeance upon David. Is there such glory as Absalom has done this day for Israel. All of Israel is with Absalom. And Absalom is the avenger of Israel. Long live the memory of Absalom. And long live the memory of Saul. And may the name of David be cursed in the land.

(HARSH LAUGH) Ha ha! Cursed is the name of David.

(LEAVES REPEATING THE LAST LINE)

Joab

Angry men do not fear stooping to blasphemy.

David

We all stoop to the level of our hatreds.

Nathan

David. Solomon does not hate you. He loves you like an adoring child.

David

Why? Why has he done this? Why has he turned against me? Haven't I always shown him favor and forgiveness? Even when he killed Amnon and murdered half my heart, didn't I keep alive the remaining half where he lives. I did not sacrifice him to justice as was required by the laws of the Lord Yahveh. What more can a father do than take upon himself the guilt of his son's crime.

Absalom, Absalom my son. Why have you done this? I would give you the kingdom. But to take what can only be gotten by a father's giving of it, is even beyond my powers to allow. This giving from a father to his son is the only true love we mortals can ever know. And when you take without being given, you bled both our souls of love. Without this love of father and son, the world ceases to be endurable. For there is nothing left to assure us of hope.

Nathan

Let us send for Solomon. David, impart your blessings upon your loving son Solomon.

Joab

My Lord David, messengers have arrived with news that Absalom has left Jerusalem with his troops.

David

If any man crosses the path of Absalom, I implore him to "deal gently for my sake (Samuel II, 18.5)" with my son.

Joab

Haven't I always arranged events to fit David's best interests?

(BLACK OUT THE SCENE OF THE PAST)

Nathan

He will be here soon. You will see David that your heart's desire will be answered.

David

What? What did you say? I am waiting for news. What news do you have?

Nathan

He will soon be here. And you will see what an adoring son you have. A son who has come in all his humbleness to await his father's blessing.

Bath-sheba

Yes David. It is true. As we all honor and love you, Solomon is your devoted son.

David

I see. I see two runners approaching. What can it mean. One runner by himself is merely a courier. But two runners. Two runners are meant to cushion a painful message.

(THE SCENE OF THE PAST LIGHTS UP. IN THE BACK OF THE SCENE, BUT VERY PROMINENT, IS A SHADOW SILHOUETTE OF A TREE WITH A BODY CAUGHT IN ITS BRANCHES DANGLING OFF THE GROUND. JOAB IS STANDING WITH A BLOOD SMEARED SWORD IN HIS HAND)

Joab

(SALUTES DAVID WITH HIS SWORD)

So. So shall it be with all the enemies of my Lord David as has befallen Absalom this day.

David

(IN THE PRESENT SCENE. DAVID JUMPS OUT OF HIS CHAIR AND BEGINS WAILING AND TEARING HIS CLOTHES)

"O my son Absalom, my son Absalom! Would I have died for thee, O Absalom my son, my son.

(Samuel II, 19.1)

(DAVID FLINGS HIMSELF ON THE FLOOR TO PROSTRATE HIMSELF)

Joab

What! What is this you do! You mourn for Absalom? "Thou hast shamed this day the face of all thy servants, who this day have saved thy life.

(Samuel II, 19.6)"

If we had all perished and Absalom lived, that would have pleased David. You love him that hated you, "and hatest them that love thee. (Samuel II, 19.7)"

Get up! Get up and go forth to speak to the hearts of your servants! Their hearts are full of joy and victory!

I swear by the Lord Yahveh, that if you do not go forth and show your face before your mighty men, not one will ever remain with you again! And that will bring you greater disaster than has ever befallen you!

(SCENE OF THE PAST BLACKS OUT. ABISHAG AND BATH-SHEBA HELP DAVID BACK UP ON HIS CHAIR. DAVID COMPOSES HIMSELF)

David

(SPEAKING VERY COLDLY AND UNEMOTIONALLY)

Who is with Solomon?

Nathan

Why, those you see here. Most of the court are with Solomon. The ministers over the districts. And Benaiah, commander over your bodyguard.

David

And who is with Adonijah?

Nathan

Abiathar and his priests, the elders of Judah, some from the other tribes. The Benjamites as one would expect. And Joab, the commander over the mighty men.

David

Joab is with Adonijah? '

Nathan

Yes my Lord David.

David

Bring Solomon to me. Him will I make the instrument of my will.

(A SCRIM DROPS BEHIND THE SCENE AND THE FIGURE OF SOLOMON WALKS ON BEHIND THE SCRIM. HE KNEELS AND ONLY THE SHADOW OF SOLOMON KNEELING CAN BE SEEN)

Listen. Listen to the word of David. And to these words I bind you in solemn promise. You have I chosen to be king of Judah and Israel. Listen and know what it means to be king. Swear by all the holy and profane oaths that you are bound by the words of a dying king. Yes, I feel the weariness of life coming over me. Therefore, know what it is to be king. You will learn. You will learn that a king bares the weight of all the people's loves and hatreds, joys and recriminations. And he himself is full of desire and resentment, exultation and despair

I will say onto you, in the presence of Nathan, that you must fear the anger of the Lord Yahveh. And do all that which proclaims his glory. And the people of Judah and Israel, you must rule over with the staff of the laws of Moses. Like a shepherd who watches over his flock of wayward sheep.

That you must do to be king.

But, to become king, you must swear to be David's instrument of reckoning. What have I left to pass on to the memory of David's glory. Only the sickness in my heart. Purge my heart of its agony, and I will make you king.

Know you the Benjamite Shimei, the Son of Gera? He did cast stones upon my suffering when I crossed over the river Jordan fleeing the bitterness of my son Absalom. He shouted damnation be upon David. He flung all the curses of the House of Saul upon God's anointed. Therefore, I command you to fling the full vengeance of David upon him. And "bring his hoar head down to the grave with blood. (King I, 2.9)" and command every man to curse the race of Saul. Saul, who stalks my guilt and defeats my peace.

Yet more solemn than all the rest, this my strongest heart's obsession you must satisfy me. Know you Joab, my nephew, who commands my mighty men. He. He shed the innocent blood of two noble captains of Israel. And brought the blame of his crime upon my honor. You must remove his blood crime from my name.

Moreover, he did thrust his sword into the depths of my heart. His wound will never close. My soul pours out of the gash.

(OUTSIDE OF DAVID'S BEDCHAMBER, JOAB RUNS ACROSS THE STAGE SEEKING SAFETY BY THE ALTAR IN FRONT OF THE ARK)

Chase him out of every sanctuary. For there should be no place for him to hide from punishment for his heinous deed.

(BENAIAH CHASES JOAB AND CATCHES UP TO HIM BY THE ALTAR. HE DRAWS HIS SWORD AND HOLDS IT OVER JOAB'S HEAD)

And when I fell upon the ground to cry. To cry over my bleeding soul, he had no pity for my mangled heart. Show no pity for him. Show no pity for the murderer of David's soul.

(SOLOMON LIFTS HIS HAND. BENAIAH GRABS HOLD OF JOAB)

Remember, this you swear to me. To do justice and purge the pain from David's heart. Only revenge can purge my pain. Be the outcry of my revenge from beyond my grave.

(SOLOMON DROPS HIS ARM, AND BENAIAH BRINGS DOWN HIS SWORD
ON JOAB KILLING HIM)

David

Peace, peace. I soon will have my peace. David will soon
have his peace and sleep with his fathers.

The End

APPENDIX: ALTERNATIVE SCENE OF TAMAR'S RAPE (P. 73-77)

(TAMAR BURSTS INTO THE ROOM. HER CLOTHING IS TORN AND HER APPEARANCE IS WILD. SHE IS COVERED WITH DUST.)

Tamar

(Crying)

Absalom, Absalom.

Jonadab

(JONADAB COMES IN IMMEDIATELY AFTER HER.)

My Lord, Absalom. I brought her here right away.

(SHE COLLAPSES AFTER TAKING A FEW STEPS. ABSALOM AND SHEBA CARRY HER TO THE BED.)

Absalom

What . . . what has happened?

Jonadab

A demon has dragged her through the torture of shame.

Tamar

I am shamed. Tamar is ruined. Help me. Absalom.

Help me.

Absalom

What demon? I will crush him. Who?! Tell me who!

Jonadab

His hate for my Lord Absalom is more powerful than his honor.

Absalom

Who hates me so?

Jonadab

In the House of David there is hate hiding in every corner.

But only one is powerful enough not to be afraid of his hate.

Absalom

Tell me! I command you to tell me! Or I will show you the strength of my hate!

Jonadab

Your . . . your brother Amnon.

Tamar

No! No! Absalom? No! Don't fall into his trap.

Absalom

What has he done? Tell me! Tell me how many ways I must hate him. Tell me!

Jonadab

I tried to stop him. But he was drunk with hate. He had been planning it for some time. He had pretended to be ill, and convinced the King to send Tamar to him to prepare delicacies for him to eat. When she arrived, he sent away all his servants. But I know what happened because he had bragged to me about what he was going to do.

He began by speaking lewd things to Tamar. Saying he too is a brother of Tamar like Absalom. And he became more and more angry, shouting and crying as if in pain. He caught hold of her and threw her on his bed. Then he stopped for a moment repeating to himself "We shall see. We shall see. Fathers beget sons. Sons beget fathers." And as if falling under the spell of his own words, his eyes rolled, and his mouth quivered and his body trembled uncontrollably. Then he forced his frame on top of her like a mountain pressing down on air.

When he had finished doing his will upon her, he calmly called his servants to "Remove this strumpet from my presence and bolt the door after her." I found her stunned standing outside his door just waiting for the earth to swallow her up and cover her shape.