

THE HOUSE OF DAVID

by

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

David	King of Israel
Bathsheba	Wife of Uriah the Hittite; wife of David
Joab	General of David's army
Hushai	Advisor to David
Nathan	Prophet
Meribaal	Son of Jonathan, the son of the former king, Saul
Amnon	Firstborn son of David and Ahinoam
Ahinoam	Wife of David
Absalom	Son of David and Maccah
Tamar	Daughter of David and Maccah; Absalom's twin sister
Maccah	Wife of David
Adonaijah	Son of David and Haggit
Yedidya	Son of David and Bathsheba
Yasmina	Daughter of Hanun, King of the Ammonites; Absalom's wife
Uriah	Lieutenant in David's army; a Hittite; blind in right eye
Yehiel	Lieutenant in Absalom's army
Itai	Lieutenant in David's army
Zadok	High Priest of Israel
Ahimaaz	Son of Zadok
Abiathar	High Priest of Israel
Farak	Soldier; a Phoenician
Simeon	Soldier; a Judean

Adrianos	Soldier, a Greek
Michael	Beggar
Raziel	Beggar
Eliyahu	Beggar; one-armed cripple
Yitzhak	Petitioner
Nabat	Petitioner
Shimshon	Servant to Absalom
Servants	

ACT I SCENE 1

INT. INSIDE THE BARRACKS IN JERUSALEM.
TWO SOLDIERS ARE PLAYING AT DICE.

FARAK: By Ashtar, give me a six.

SIMEON: Four! Ha. Even luck flees from you, Farak.

FARAK: You blood-sucking Judean bastard. I swear,
you've cast the evil eye upon me.

SIMEON: Never, my friend. It's just that the dice are
more fickle and faithless than a woman, who
while lying in your arms thinks only of how to
better her fortune with another. Yet, if you
must, keep faith with your Phoenician goddess.
One day she may bend her ear towards you.

FARAK: You mock and disdain Ashtar at your peril,
Simeon. Be warned, she's proud, jealous and most
vengeful.

SIMEON: What else but a woman?

FARAK: Scoff all you like but the god you worship is no
less vengeful. Besides, he doesn't even have a
name.

SIMEON: Oh yes he does.

FARAK: Speak it then.

SIMEON: We're forbidden to utter it.

FARAK: How convenient.

SIMEON:: It's true. It's a grave sin to take His name in
vain and so we're only permitted to use his
title - the Lord and King of the World.

FARAK: Ha! That's a sovereign argument. But, if you
can't call upon him by name or swear by him, how
do you earn his favour?

SIMEON: With burnt offerings and by keeping his commandments.

FARAK: Commandments? Like what?

SIMEON: We're not allowed to steal.

FARAK: That's a waste, Simeon.

SIMEON: ...or commit adultery.

FARAK: An even fleshlier waste. Seems to me this god of yours knows nothing about the pleasures of living. How many of these godly laws are there?

SIMEON: Six hundred and thirteen.

FARAK: No wonder your race oozes oppression. You'd be better off praying to another god.

SIMEON: We're forbidden to do that, too.

FARAK: This is madness, my friend. Everyone knows, just as night follows day that each god and goddess has their own domain.

SIMEON: (SHAKES THE DICE) Enough, I'll argue no more. Let me at least enjoy the pleasures of gambling.

FARAK: I'm surprised you're allowed to dice at all.

SIMEON: (GROANS) A two!

FARAK: See! Even the dice speak out against your foolishness. May Ashtar be kind to me. Arrgh. I don't believe it. A one! It cannot be.

SIMEON: Hah! I'll continue to believe in the one god, while you, my friend, best stick to drinking.

ADRIANOS RACES IN EXCITEDLY.

ADRIANOS: Have you heard?

FARAK: Adrianos, you Greek whoremonger. Until you speak the words, how can we possibly know what's in that feeble mind of yours?

ADRIANOS: The emissaries sent to Ammon have returned.

SIMEON: What of it?

ADRIANOS: Half their beards have been shaved off and their right hands cut off at the wrist, like common thieves.

SIMEON: La!

FARAK: I swear by Baal, those Ammonites are cruel barbarians.

ADRIANOS: The king was so infuriated, he immediately gave orders to mobilise. We go to war.

FARAK: War, you say? May the gods bless you Adrianos. This is the best news possible. Those Ammonites have no stomach for fighting. We'll crack some heads and loot to boot instead of rotting here in these barren barracks. Ashtar be praised, I feel it in my bones that my luck is about to change. Come on, this calls for a drink.

ALL EXIT

ACT I SCENE 2

INT. THE KING'S PALACE IN JERUSALEM.
DAY. KING DAVID CONFERS WITH HIS
ADVISORS AND CAPTAINS.

JOAB: My lord, Rabbah is an imposing fortress. The walls are much higher than our beloved Jerusalem. I fear a frontal attack will never succeed.

DAVID: Then besiege it.

JOAB: A good plan except for the spring that runs through the city. The enemy will have an endless supply of fresh water and with it, hope.

DAVID: I don't care how long it takes. King Hanun cannot be allowed to get away with such an insult. I offer him peace and his reply is that

all Israelites shall be treated as liars and thieves until the Armband of Seth is returned. I've never even heard of this armband. What do you know, Hushai?

HUSHAI: It's said to be an ancient heirloom of Ammonite kings, sire. When King Saul defeated Hanun's father at Jabesh Gilead, Hanun was barely thirteen. But he had the courage to ride into the Israelite camp to claim his father's body.

DAVID: Foolish but brave.

HUSHAI: I agree, sire, but Saul was impressed and agreed to hand over the body on condition that Hanun swear to keep the peace for as long as Saul was king. After Hanun had sworn, Saul gave up the body but kept the dead king's armour, weapons and the Armband of Seth as the spoils of victory.

DAVID: So that's what's biting Hanun.

HUSHAI: Yes. Naturally, he would've been furious and felt cheated. But because he had already sworn, he could do nothing about it.

DAVID: What happened to the armband?

HUSHAI: Nobody knows. It was never seen or heard of again.

DAVID: It doesn't matter. After what Hanun has just done, I wouldn't give it up even if I did have it.

JOAB: Sire, why go to war over an armband?

DAVID: When I became King, Joab, I needed to show the tribes that I was more than a Judean. That's why I took Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it my capital. Then to unite the people in their worship, I brought the Ark of the Lord, here.

HUSHAI: Very wise, your Majesty.

DAVID: It's more than that Hushai. One day, I intend build a temple to the Lord. But for now, the

tribes are watching me, waiting for any sign of weakness. That's why the Ammonites must be punished and quickly. I'm putting you in charge of the campaign, Joab. Take Rabbah and bring me Hanun's head.

JOAB: Then Rabbah shall be yours, my lord. That I promise you.

JOAB EXITS

HUSHAI: My lord, Meribaal the son of Jonathan the son of Saul awaits an audience as do your children.

DAVID: Then send them in.

AMNON, ABSALOM, TAMAR, ADONAIJAH ENTER
FOLLOWED BY MERIBAAL WHO WALKS WITH A
LIMP.

DAVID: Welcome to Jerusalem and may peace be upon thee, Meribaal. You bear such resemblance to your father. It is as if his spirit had returned.

MERIBAAL: My lord, you are most kind. I bring greetings from my grandfather, Yehoshua ben Abinadab and the northern tribes.

DAVID: And how fares your grandfather?

MERIBAAL: Getting older and more frail, sire.

DAVID: Yet, he still has the strength to rule the North with an iron fist.

MERIBAAL: Even iron must bend to smith's hammer, sire. And so, he has sent me to your court as a token of the renewed trust between the north and the south.

DAVID: May all the tribes follow his example. But come now, how fares your leg after such a long journey?

MERIBAAL: (ASIDE) To be judged by appearances is a curse more burdensome than a club foot. (SMILES WEAKLY) Passingly, my lord. One learns to bear the pain and discomfort...(ASIDE) of being

usurped.

- DAVID: Spoken like a true man and a prince.
- MERIBAAL: I am unworthy of such praise, your Majesty, especially in such poor rags.
- DAVID: Fear not, dear Meribaal. All honours and wealth that were your father's shall be restored you. His untimely death at the hands of the Philistines shall not rob you of your just due.
- MERIBAAL: (ASIDE) Unlike you who keeps me from the crown. (BOW HIS HEAD) Your majesty is far too generous.
- DAVID: Come now, call me uncle. For as your father was like a brother to me so you shall be as a beloved nephew and eat at my table and share in all I have.
- MERIBAAL: As you wish, Uncle.
- DAVID: Good. Then come and greet your cousins. This is my eldest - Amnon
- AMNON: Welcome cousin.
- DAVID: And the twins - Absalom and Tamar.
- ABSALOM NODS WHILE TAMAR EXCITEDLY
KISSES MERIBAAL ON THE CHEEK.
- TAMAR: What a joy to have you here, Meribaal.
- MERIBAAL: Thank you, sweet cousin.
- DAVID: And finally but not least, Adonaijah.
- ADONAIJAH: (CROSSING HIS ARMS) The line to the crown seems to be growing longer, cousin. May the Lord grant you a patient life.
- TAMAR: Pay Adonaijah no heed, cousin.
- ADONAIJAH: Beauty and foolishness are ever inseparable, dear sister.

ABSALOM AND AMNON CLENCH THEIR FISTS

AND GLARE AT ADONAIJAH WHO RAISES HIS
HANDS IN INNOCENCE.

ADONAIJAH: Peace, my brothers. Have you no humour or wit?
 ABSALOM: Not when it's at my sister's expense.
 AMNON: Apologise to Tamar before I make you.
 ADONAIJAH: You see, Meribaal, the most peaceful and loving
of families. Yes, yes, of course I'm sorry
dearest Tamar.
 TAMAR: (GIGGLING AT ADONAIJAH'S EMBARRASSMENT) I accept.
 DAVID: Now that's settled. I'll send a servant to show
you to your quarters, Meribaal. Tonight we shall
celebrate your arrival and the war with Ammon.
 MERIBAAL: You are too kind, Uncle.

ALL EXIT EXCEPT MERIBAAL

Words and deeds, like oil and water, mix not. If
only I could rid myself of the sludge of shame
that overwhelms me in the presence of the
usurper. David's words are warm and soft but I
shall not be so easily charmed, for his heart is
as black as onyx and just as cold.

I shall match his duplicity and never show my
true face to any man or woman. Only the sunniest
of smiles shall grace my face despite the
darkness of my thoughts.

Now having seen how David's sons bear their
father's pride, my course is clear: to feed
their lust, arrogance and ambition with
flattery.

Thus shall I, the last of line of the House of
Saul exact my revenge. Nothing shall be left to
fate or chance as day by day I make them dance.

MERIBAAL EXITS

ACT I SCENE 3

INT. THE PALACE. NIGHT. DAVID TOSSES
AND TURNS, MUMBLING IN HIS SLEEP.

DAVID: No! No!

DAVID AWAKENS AND SITS UP, LOOKING
DISORIENTED.

DAVID: Such an ill-fated dream. The blood of four dead
lion cubs stained the claws of a proud lion. The
why and the wherefore I do not understand.
Perhaps it is the full moon that brings such
strange portents.

HE SIGHS AND THEN SLIDES OUT OF BED
AND WALKS OVER TO THE WATER BASIN TO
WASH HIS FACE AND NECK. MOONLIGHT IS
STREAMING IN FROM THE BALCONY. A
WOMAN'S VOICE IS HEARD IN THE DISTANCE
SINGING IN HEBREW.

WOMAN'S VOICE: *Ooh wah, ooh wah, ooh wah lama u madua nad
haetzev ba'olam? Ooh wah, ooh wah, ooh wah, lama
u madua, ut'suvim shirai koolam.*

DAVID FOLLOWS THE SINGING OUT ONTO THE
BALCONY. LOOKS OUT ACROSS THE CITY.

DAVID: How strange and dreamlike. That song...my mother
used to sing me to sleep with it. Hushai.

HUSHAI ENTERS, THE SINGING STOPS.

HUSHAI: My lord?

DAVID: That singing..,

HUSHAI: What singing, my lord?

DAVID: A moment ago, I heard a woman's voice. When I
looked out over the city, I saw her, on the
rooftop over there, washing her hair.

HUSHAI: My lord, there is no-one on the rooftop.

DAVID: She was there. I saw her. Tall with long dark hair.

HUSHAI: Majesty. I see nothing but empty rooftops, the full moon and the stars.

DAVID: I swear I saw her, Hushai.

HUSHAI: Perhaps it was a trick of the moonlight or a dream, perhaps?

DAVID: No, Hushai, she was real. Whose house is that?

HUSHAI: It belongs to Uriah the Hittite. He's a lieutenant in your army and left yesterday for the war with the Ammonites.

DAVID: (ABSENT-MINDEDLY) Uriah...

HUSHAI: You know the man, my lord?

DAVID: Yes. But that was very long ago. The woman on the rooftop must be his wife or daughter. Send for her.

HUSHAI: At this hour lord? It's almost midnight.

DAVID: I must speak with her and get to the bottom of this mystery immediately.

HUSHAI: But, my lord.

DAVID: Just do as I say, Hushai.

HUSHAI: Of course, your majesty.

HUSHAI EXITS. DAVID STARTS TO PACE UP AND DOWN THE ROOM ARGUING WITH HIMSELF.

DAVID: You're being a fool. You must have been dreaming or as Hushai says, it's merely a trick of the moonlight. Then why this pounding in my heart? And the song? (PAUSES) It reminds me of her. But my mother's been dead for many years.

STANDS BY THE BALCONY DEEP IN THOUGHT UNTIL HUSHAI ENTERS.

HUSHAI: The woman is here, your majesty.

DAVID: Send her in and leave us.

HUSHAI: Yes, my lord.

BATSHEBA ENTERS AND CURTSIES POLITELY.

DAVID: What is your name?

BATSHEBA: Batsheba, your majesty.

DAVID: I saw you on the rooftop of your house tonight, you were singing.

BATSHEBA: I have been indoors all evening, your majesty.

DAVID: But I saw you just now...washing your hair.

BATSHEBA: My hair is dry. My lord must have mistaken me for another.

DAVID: No. It was you. The moment you walked in, I knew it was you.

BATSHEBA: How could you, my lord?

DAVID: The pounding in my heart.

BATSHEBA: Your majesty is joking with me.

DAVID: (TAKES HER HAND AND PLACES IT UPON HIS HEART AND HOLDS IT THERE) Can't you feel it?

BATSHEBA: (BLUSHES) My lord.

DAVID: Do you feel what I'm feeling?

BATSHEBA: I don't understand, my lord.

DAVID: My heart is racing because of you.

BATSHEBA: No, no, your majesty. It can't be.

DAVID: It's true. I don't understand it myself. But I cannot deny what I'm feeling. You must feel it, too, you must.

BATSHEBA: What I feel or don't feel doesn't matter. I'm a

married woman. Uriah the Hittite is my husband.

DAVID: Then why do you lower your eyes like that? You do feel it. How strange, I don't know what's come over me. Although we've just met, it's as if I've known you all my life.

BATSHEBA SHAKES HER HEAD AND TRIES TO TAKE HER HAND AWAY. DAVID STOPS HER.

BATSHEBA: No, my lord, please I beg you.

DAVID: You have nothing to fear. All you have to do is tell me you don't feel the same and you'll be free to go.

BATSHEBA: I cannot lie to you.

DAVID KISSES HER EYES LIGHTLY.

BATSHEBA: Your majesty, Please don't...You mustn't...

DAVID KISSES HER LIPS LIGHTLY.

DAVID: I can't help myself. You aren't an enchantress are you?

BATSHEBA SINKS TO THE FLOOR AND BEGINS TO CRY.

I didn't mean to insult you, Batsheba. I just had an irresistible urge to kiss you. Please don't cry.

BATSHEBA: I can't help it. It hurts too much. How could you know that I have loved you from the moment you rode up to my father's house ten years ago to ask for my hand.

DAVID: Your father was Ahitophel, chief advisor to King Saul?

BATSHEBA: Yes. But instead of marrying me, you gave me to Uriah as a reward for helping you slay Goliath.

DAVID: I never saw you. If I had, I could never have done such a thing.

BATSHEBA: You had no choice because of the oath you made to Uriah. That's why I agreed to marry him, so that you would not be foresworn.

DAVID: You did that for me? I had no idea.

BATSHEBA: How could you? How could you know that you have been the only man I have ever loved. Sometimes I wished it were not so. But then I would tell myself that one day we would meet and all would be set aright. I did not think that it would take ten long, loveless and barren years.

DAVID: Your love shames me.

LIFTS HER UP, CARRIES HER TO THE BED.

BATSHEBA: No. Please. Stop.

DAVID: But why? I love you and you love me.

BATSHEBA: I will not play the harlot to your passion.

DAVID: You think so ill of me?

BATSHEBA: No, I didn't mean like that. But in the morning you will be the king and I shall remain a married woman.

DAVID: And if you were not married?

BATSHEBA: I would be free to follow my heart.

DAVID: Then I shall have Uriah divorce you.

BATSHEBA: Do not toy with me. I could not bear it.

DAVID: I do mean it. Once you're divorced, I shall marry you. I promise.

BATSHEBA: I don't believe you.

DAVID: How can I convince you?

BATSHEBA: As one oath took me away from you, then make

another to bring me back.

DAVID: So be it. On the lives and heads of my children, I, David, King of Israel, promise that once you are a free I shall marry thee.

BATSHEBA: And I promise to marry thee, my love.

THEY KISS AND FALL TOGETHER IN A
PASSIONATE EMBRACE.

[FADE OUT]

ACT I SCENE 4

EXT. COURTYARD OF DAVID'S PALACE - DAY

ABSALOM AND TAMAR STROLL ARM IN ARM
WHILE AMNON, HIDDEN BEHIND ONE OF THE
PILLARS EAVESDROPS ON THEM. UNSEEN BY
ALL OF THEM, MERIBAAL, OBSERVES
EVERYTHING, SMILING TO HIMSELF.

TAMAR: It's true, Shooli.

ABSALOM: I'm not in the mood for teasing, Tamar.

TAMAR: Don't be so grumpy? You should be pleased that Father loves you best of all.

ABSALOM: I always thought he loved you the most.

TAMAR: When we were younger, perhaps. But now that you and our brothers have grown up, he has little time for me.

ABSALOM: Perhaps it's because you're not a little girl any more.

TAMAR: Don't change the subject. We were talking about you. Don't you see the way Father's eyes light up when he looks at you?

ABSALOM: No. And anyway, if he's so proud of me, then why doesn't he say so?

TAMAR: I don't know, why. Maybe because he doesn't want to make the others angry? Joseph's brothers were so jealous of him that they sold him into slavery.

ABSALOM: I'm not a Joseph. And anyway I can look after myself.

TAMAR: I know you can. But, I don't trust Adonaijah - he thinks he's better than everyone else. And Amnon has beady eyes. The way he looks at me makes me shudder.

AMNON: (BITES HIS FIST)

ABSALOM: You worry too much. Amnon's a harmless fool and Adonaijah's only good for bullying servants. None of them have any real courage.

TAMAR: I hope you're right.

ABSALOM: When have you known me to be wrong?

TAMAR AND ABSALOM EXIT. AMNON STEPS OUT FROM BEHIND A COLUMN.

AMNON: I can't believe it. All I wanted was that she should love me.

MERIBAAL COUGHS AND STEPS OUT FROM BEHIND A COLUMM.

AMNON: What are you doing here, cousin?

MERIBAAL: The same as you, dear cousin. Keeping an eye out on those conniving twins. They're not to be trusted, you know. She's too beautiful and he's far too ambitious. If you don't watch out, she'll steal your heart and he your crown.

AMNON: I'm afraid, she's already done that. If only there was some way to have her.

MERIBAAL: Have you forgotten you're the king's firstborn and heir to the throne. One day they're both going to have to bend to your will.

AMNON: If only that day were now. We both know that my

father's not going to give up the throne anytime soon. He intends to rule for a long time. By then, it will be too late.

MERIBAAL: Hmmm...I see.

AMNON: And so I skulk after her like an unwanted dog. I feel so ashamed. But I can't help myself.(GRABS MERIBAAL BY THE SHOULDERS) Promise me you won't tell anyone about this.

MERIBAAL: Don't worry, dearest cousin. Your secret is safe with me.

AMNON: Thank you Meribaal, you're a true friend and it does feel good to talk to someone and let out what's been eating away inside me.

MERIBAAL: If you let me, I'll do more than listen. Give me time to think on this...perhaps I can find a way to open the door to your heart's desire and break the spell that Tamar's cast over you.

AMNON: Do you really think she's bewitched me?

MERIBAAL: Look at how you're behaving - much worse than a love-sick servant boy.

AMNON: You're right. She must've bewitched me.

MERIBAAL: There is only one way to deal with a witch. If you do what I say, I promise that you'll be able to do whatever you want with our dear Tamar. And as for Absalom, he'll keep until you're king. And then you'll requite him tenfold for his haughtiness.

AMNON: Do that for me and I will be eternally grateful.

MERIBAAL: Speak not of gratitude, cousin. I do this to protect the throne from traitorous usurpers. Now leave me, I have some thinking to do.

AMNON EXITS

Love, lust and hate how closely entwined are the three. And how in the twinkling they change their hue. I'll lead this donkey by the nose

until his lust is sated, then nothing shall remain of love but naked hatred.

MERIBAAL EXITS.

ACT I SCENE 5

EXT. DAVID'S PALACE. DAYTIME.

DAVID AND HUSHAI ENTER.

HUSHAI: Welcome back my lord. Your majesty's presence has been missed this past moon and a half. How fares the war with the Ammonites?

DAVID: The siege takes its toll as much of us as the Ammonites. As each sally against them flounders, their spirits rise higher despite their slowly dwindling supplies of food. It's as if the walls were protected by some unholy magic.

HUSHAI: It is said that the snake-worshippers mixed the mortar for the foundations with the sacrificial blood of children.

DAVID: I am tempted to believe it. But speaking of children how fare mine?

HUSHAI: All in good health and spirit. Shall I send for them?

DAVID: Soon. In the meantime what news of Batsheba?

HUSHAI: As you commanded, I personally delivered the message that your majesty had been unexpectedly called to the siege.

DAVID: How did she take such news?

HUSHAI: With some surprise, I might say, which she quickly covered up. Yet every day since the full moon, she has come to enquire about the siege and news of you, always with what seemed a trace

of sadness in her eyes.

BATSHEBA APPEARS AND WAITS AT A
DISTANCE.

Yet your majesty may judge for himself see here
she comes.

DAVID: I wish to speak with her alone, Hushai.

HUSHAI: Of course, my lord.

HUSHAI EXITS

DAVID: Come closer, my darling and let me bathe my eyes
in your beauty. But what is this? How pale you
look.

BATSHEBA: I have missed you my lord and feared for your
safety.

DAVID: There's nothing to worry about, I am safe.
Besides a soothsayer once foretold that I will
die in my bed mostly of old age.

BATSHEBA: I pay no heed to such prophecies.

DAVID: Don't look so peeved? I only said it to calm
your fears.

BATSHEBA: There are other qualms that are not so easily
dismissed.

DAVID: Are you ill?

BATSHEBA: I'm afraid I am with child.

DAVID: What? How so?

BATSHEBA: Two moons have passed since my last courses.

DAVID: I thought you were barren?

BATSHEBA: As I believed and so it seemed with my husband.
If Uriah should discover my state he'll surely
accuse me of adultery. I'll be stoned to death.

DAVID: Come now, my love. You place the chariot before

the horse. As a woman gets older, it's not unusual that her courses may easily be missed.

BATSHEBA: I have never missed one before in my life and then there's the morning sickness.

DAVID: I see. (LOOKS TROUBLED AS HE PACES BACK AND FORTH)

BATSHEBA: What am I to do?

DAVID: Don't panic. I will find a way...wait a moment...I have it. Of course, how simple. I shall bring Uriah back from the siege, immediately and before anyone can guess your state. You will take him to your bed then any child can rightly be claimed his.

BATSHEBA: But it will be your son who one day might be king.

DAVID: The child can never be acknowledged and so will never sit on the throne. Besides, I have three elder sons in line before any bastard.

BATSHEBA: (TAKEN ABACK) I knew it was wrong to sleep with you that night. How could I have been so stupid?

DAVID: You're not to blame. Remember I swore to marry you and I still hope to. But right now the most important thing is to have Uriah in your bed. Do you agree?

BATSHEBA: (NODS HER HEAD)

DAVID: Then leave it to me.

BATSHEBA: I felt so sick at the thought that you might cast me aside.

DAVID: Never. I love you with an abiding love. So don't let such fears make you lose your head. Everything shall right itself, I promise you.

THEY EMBRACE. UNSEEN MERIBAAL APPROACHES AND SEES THEM. HE REMAINS IN THE SHADOWS.

MERIBAAL: (ASIDE) The king and Uriah's wife? An unholy tryst for me to twist and turn it back upon him.

DAVID: Who goes there?

MERIBAAL: (STEPPING OUT OF THE SHADOWS) It is I, Meribaal, Uncle, come to welcome you home.

DAVID: Ah. Meribaal. (ASIDE TO BATHSHEBA) Go to your house and remain there for the time being. I will send for you only after your husband has come and gone.

(ALoud) Your plea has touched my heart, dear lady. Return now to your home and assured I shall bring your husband back to comfort you.

BATSHEBA: I thank you, your majesty, for your understanding and compassion.

BATSHEBA EXITS.

DAVID: Meribaal. It seems you have become more of a man in my absence.

MERIBAAL: (ASIDE) In your absence indeed I would be king. (ALoud) All the better to serve you, Uncle.

DAVID: Thank you, Nephew. If only my sons showed such consideration and courtesy.

MERIBAAL: I believe that in their hearts they do. Yet is it not natural for them to vie with each other for your favour and the eventual crown?

DAVID: Your wisdom outstrips your years.

MERIBAAL: I speak only what is obvious to the eye.

DAVID: Obvious or not, you are most perceptive. However, I must attend to matters of the kingdom but I expect your presence at my table tonight. We shall talk more then.

MERIBAAL: As you command, Uncle.

DAVID: Until then, farewell.

MERIBAAL: May the Lord speed you...

DAVID EXITS

...to your doom.

Is it possible that Batsheba has been unfaithful with the king? No, he could not be so foolish. Though, when a man lusts after a woman, he thinks only of the rod between his legs and the fire between hers. And until that desire is quenched he is as mad as camel that has scented water. Yet, even if she has been unfaithful, there is no proof. They would have to be caught in the act. Hmmm...while lust is highly potent, jealousy and its twin - revenge outstrip it. I wonder, if Uriah were to find out, would he be so incensed as to kill the king? And in doing so, deprive me of my sport for all the king would lose would be his life. (PAUSES TO THINK)

No, this knowledge I shall keep to myself alone, and wait for a time more prone, to prick the conscience and the heart of the king, that he come to curse his birth as he suffers the loss of everything.

(EXIT MERIBAAL)

ACT I SCENE 6

INT. DAVID'S CHAMBER - AFTERNOON

ENTER URIAH

DAVID: Uriah, you are most welcome. What news of the siege?

URIAH: Since your departure, my lord nothing has changed. The Ammonites continue to defend stoutly against all our attacks. There seems no way to breach the walls.

DAVID: What of the gates?

URIAH: As you have seen for yourself, sire, they are the most heavily defended point. Arrows and stones rain down upon anyone who comes within range. We've lost too many good men there.

DAVID: So the city seems impregnable?

URIAH: It would appear so. General Joab wants to starve them out but they show no signs of weakening. Autumn will soon be upon us. After that, who knows what Winter will bring in those mountains.

DAVID: Something must be done before then.

URIAH: I agree, my lord. But pardon my asking; you saw all this for yourself less than seven days ago. Any messenger could have reported this. Why did you send for me?

DAVID: You are right, Lieutenant. I did not recall you for just a report. You were always loyal to Saul and to his son, Jonathan, my closest friend.

URIAH: That was before you were king, sire.

DAVID: Have no fear, I do not hold that against you - loyalty is a most admirable trait. You also took my side at Mizpeh against Yehoshua and the northern tribes when I was finally chosen king.

URIAH: I spoke the truth, my lord, nothing more nothing less. Besides, I have no love for Yehoshua and the northern tribes.

DAVID: You are far too humble, Lieutenant. Nor have I forgotten all that you did for me against Goliath.

URIAH: That debt was discharged long ago, my lord. Because of you, I have a beautiful wife.

DAVID: Of course. nonetheless, If feel I have been remiss in my thanks. Joab believes that you are an exemplary officer. I believe that you deserve to be promoted to captain.

URIAH: I am honoured, sire. But why recall me from the battle? You could have sent a messenger.

DAVID: You deserve to hear it from my lips.

URIAH: Thank you, my lord.

DAVID: Now, as an additional reward, you may go to your home. I'm sure your wife will be both surprised and delighted to see you. Return in the morning and I shall orders for the general.

URIAH: But sire, I was planning to return to the battle immediately.

DAVID: What? And not even greet your wife and share your good news?

URIAH: My lord. I have men who look to me to set an example. How can I enjoy the luxury of my bed and my wife while they remain in the field?

DAVID: I think your sentiments admirable but is it not your duty as a husband to see your wife who must be missing you?

URIAH: Seeing Batsheba would only make it more difficult to leave, sire.

DAVID: You are a strange man, Captain.

URIAH: No, my lord. Just a man who knows his limitations.

DAVID: Then you shall stay at the palace tonight and leave with orders in the morning. And this evening you shall feast at my table.

URIAH: My lord, my men are surviving on meagre rations. How could I...

DAVID: You're a difficult man to please, Captain. Since you cannot accept my hospitality perhaps you

would feel better in doing me a service?
Servant!

SERVANT ENTERS.

DAVID: Summon Meribaal.

SERVANT: Yes, your majesty.

SERVANT EXITS.

DAVID: You may recall that Jonathan had a son?

URIAH: Yes.

DAVID: Meribaal is a young man now. And except for his club foot, the very likeness of his father. But like you, he often shuns the trappings and pleasures of court.

URIAH: I do not understand, sire.

DAVID: You are one of the few to survive the Battle of Gilboa and it's said you saw how Saul and Jonathan died.

URIAH: It is something I do prefer not to talk about, my lord.

DAVID: And yet, you cannot deny that a son deserves to know how his father died. You were a loyal servant to Jonathan. I'm sure Meribaal will want to know everything about the battle. You can understand that, can't you?

URIAH: Of course, sire.

DAVID: Good.

MERIBAAL AND SERVANT ENTER

DAVID: Ah, Meribaal.

MERIBAAL: How can I be of service, Uncle?

DAVID: I have a favour to ask of you.

MERIBAAL: Name it, sire, and it is yours.

DAVID: This is Captain Uriah - a man to whom I owe much. But more importantly, he served to your father faithfully.

MERIBAAL: My father? You knew my father?

URIAH: I came with him to Hazor just after you were born.

MERIBAAL: Then you know my mother and grandfather.

URIAH: Yes.

MERIBAAL: How strange that they have never mentioned you?

URIAH: Your grandfather and I did not part on the best of terms.

MERIBAAL: I see.

DAVID: The Captain doesn't care for the company of court and returns to battle in the morning. It would please me greatly if you would be his host, tonight.

MERIBAAL: Willingly. There is much I would like to ask you about my father.

URIAH: I shall do my best.

DAVID: (TO SERVANT) Take the Captain to the stables. Collect whatever gear he has and then show him to Meribaal's quarters.

SERVANT: Yes, your majesty.

DAVID: Your orders will be ready in the morning, Captain.

URIAH: Thank you, your majesty.

URIAH AND SERVANT EXIT.

DAVID: A word before you go, Nephew.

MERIBAAL: Yes, Uncle?

DAVID: The woman you saw me with the other day was Uriah's wife. She has been quite ill recently, pining for him. When I told her that he was on his way here to be promoted, she begged that I allow him to stay for a day or two. How could I refuse her such a simple request?

MERIBAAL: I see.

DAVID: Unfortunately, Uriah is a hardened soldier and refuses to indulge in the pleasures of hearth and home while his men are in the field.

MERIBAAL: An honourable man, indeed.

DAVID: He even declined to feast at my table. Yet I made a promise to his wife which I now need your help to fulfil.

MERIBAAL: What do you wish me to do, Uncle?

DAVID: I'm sure that you have much to ask Uriah about your father in general and about the Battle of Gilboa, in particular.

MERIBAAL: He was there?

DAVID: Yes, though no one knows how he managed to survive and reach Jabesh Gilead. Perhaps for your father's sake he will tell you. Wine often loosens a man's tongue. I want you to get him drunk and then at the end of the evening have some servants take him to his house. That way you find out what you want and I get to keep my word to his wife.

MERIBAAL: Watering two camels at the same well. I'll do as you wish.

DAVID: Thank you. I knew I could rely on you, Nephew.

[FADE OUT]

ACT I

SCENE 7

INT. DAVID'S PALACE. MORNING.

DAVID IS UPSET AND PACING THE ROOM AS
MERIBAAL LOOKS EMBARRASSED.

DAVID: You did as I asked?

MERIBAAL: Yes, Uncle. At first he didn't want to drink, but I asked him to at least toast my father's memory. He could not refuse and soon became lightheaded. After that, it was easy to get him drunk. He even fell asleep at the table. Then I ordered some servants to carry him to his house but on the way they stumbled and fell. He awoke and demanded to know where they were taking him. When they told him, he got very angry, drew his dagger and ordered them to take him to their quarters. They were too afraid to refuse. After that, he lay down on one of their beds and fell asleep but not before threatening to kill anyone who disturbed him again. I only learned about it this morning and came to you, immediately.

DAVID: I wonder what got into him?

MERIBAAL: Wine makes men do strange things.

DAVID: Are you sure he was drunk?

MERIBAAL: He seemed so. But if he wasn't, then why would he pretend? One thing is certain though, by the end of the day, everyone in the palace will begin to think that Uriah's far too overzealous or that something's not right between him and his wife.

DAVID: I wouldn't think so. After all, she almost begged me to send him home.

MERIBAAL: I don't know much about women, Uncle. But I've been told that what they say and what they mean are not the same thing. She might be pretending.

DAVID: That's ridiculous.

MERIBAAL: Not if she wants to cover up something she's done. Some women get lonely when their husbands are away.

DAVID: (GIVES MERIBAAL A SIDELONG LOOK) Impossible. Batsheba's not that sort of woman. You're making a flood out of a drop of water. Uriah's a dedicated soldier that's all. I don't want to hear any gossip about Uriah, is that understood? Now, I have Uriah's orders to write. I shall not forget your service, Nephew. Thank you.

MERIBAAL: Of course, Uncle.

MERIBAAL EXITS.

DAVID SITS DOWN AT HIS WRITING TABLE AND PONDS OUT LOUD AS HE WRITES.

DAVID: Uriah, Uriah, if only you were less of soldier and more of a man. Then Batsheba might escape the accusation of adultery that would ensare us both. I must save her and in saving her, save myself and the kingdom. For if I were to confess my guilt, the clamour would rise up from the north that I am not fit to be king. Yehoshua and the northern tribes would then have the excuse they have been waiting for to rebel. That would cast the kingdom into the cauldron of a civil war and destroy all hope of peace and prosperity. All because of one overzealous soldier. This must never come to pass.

[FADE OUT]

ACT II SCENE 1

EXT. THE GATES OF JERUSALEM - DAY -
TWO BEGGARS HOLD OUT THEIR BOWLS FOR
ALMS AS PEOPLE TRAVEL IN AND OUT THE
GATES.

RAZIEL: Alms, alms for the poor.