

# THE PLAN

## A PLAY

By Eric Samuelsen

### CHARACTERS

<i>Gaia</i>	<i>Rachel's Sister</i>
GAIA	LEAH
LUCIFER	JACOB
<i>Bathsheba</i>	<i>Outside Jericho</i>
DAVID	RAHAB
BATHSHEBA	JOSHUA
<i>Ruth in the House of Boaz</i>	<i>Eve, Dying</i>
RUTH	ADAM
BOAZ	EVE

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

I STARTED WRITING *THE PLAN* THREE YEARS AGO, after a challenge from my friend Marvin Payne. He asked me to write a play that could be a vehicle for the bearing of testimony. Actually, that's not what he said: he really challenged me to write a play that wouldn't make certain mutual friends of ours uncomfortable. Anyway, the result was *Eve, Dying*. We had a reading for those same friends, and after seeing their expressions of relief, Marvin suggested that I expand it to include some companion pieces.

Now I'm in the process of directing the play that resulted, and so I'm re-reading and re-working it. And I think I understand it better, because in the meantime, I got sick. In and out of hospitals, in a drug-induced-fog kind of sick. Now the play has a very different meaning to me. And I wonder, could I say, as Eve does, "Thank you"? I think the answer is still yes, but it's harder, to be honest. I do genuinely believe that we learn lessons from illness that we could not learn if we didn't get sick, but I won't pretend that learning those lessons is fun.

So this play is about testimony, and it's about the Plan, and it's about getting sick. And it's also, a little, about science. There was a time in our history when people thought that LDS doctrines could be reconciled with scientific views on

such matters as the age of the earth, pre-Adamic death, and organic evolution. Those scientific notions were an accepted part of our cultural conversation. Then John Widtsoe died.

What's essentially happened is that a Church-wide conversation on science-and-religion questions has turned into the monolithic presentation—in CES and Sunday School—of just one point of view, what we might call McConkie/Smith literalism. And that particular scriptural literalism lends itself to a simple, compelling, internally consistent narrative. The competing scientific narratives do not seem to fit our comforting and familiar Biblical narrative as neatly.

I'm a playwright; I'm not a scientist. I can do narrative. So I decided to create a series of short plays, based on stories and characters from the Bible, which were theologically speculative and which included perspectives drawn from science. So the play was in some respects an intellectual exercise.

But then I got sick. I'm more interested now in my characters, in their pain and their fear and loss and in how angry they get with each other. I am also no more an expert in feminist Bible scholarship than I am a scientist, but I have attempted to write from a feminist perspective. At least, I've gotten to write some really fascinating women.

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ERIC SAMUELSEN, Ph.D., teaches playwriting at BYU, and until recently served as president of the Association for Mormon Letters. Others of his plays have been published in *SUNSTONE*, including *Accommodations*, *Gadianton*, and *Peculiarities*. *Sunstone* also co-produced a film version of *Peculiarities*. He is married, with four children.

I've also gotten to scratch some personal itches. I have always loathed the Book of Joshua, for example, which seems to me preposterous even when it's not actively promoting genocide. The requirements of drama forced me to take Joshua seriously as a dramatic character. I don't get polygamy and never will, but I did allow Leah to make a case for it. And at times, I've taken some liberties with the Bible. I figure, we might as well take full advantage of the 'translated correctly' loophole, which might just save us from the various absurdities of Bible inerrancy.

One final note: in general, I do not allow my plays to be published until they've gone through the crucible of re-

hearsal and performance. In the case of *The Plan*, the play has gone through multiple staged readings, and three of its pieces have been performed at the Covey Center Little Theatre and at the New Play Project in Provo. The entire play will be performed at the Covey Center sometime in the near future. I'm grateful to Scott Bronson for producing it. Above all, I'm grateful to Annette, my wife. She's been through a miserable four months with me, driving me to endless doctor's appointments, and keeping a semi-invalid fed, clothed, and amused. We've learned a lot, especially about the Great Plan of . . . what? Happiness, Salvation, Exaltation? I'll settle for Learning. To her, and to my Heavenly Father: Thank you.

#### NOTE ON THE SCRIPT

Each of these short plays can be performed on its own. But if the entire cycle is produced, it can be performed with two actors (1 M 1 F), or with any number up to eleven (5 F 6 M) Gaia and Eve must be played by the same actress.

## GAIA

(LUCIFER stares down at a lagoon. GAIA enters, looks around, sees him.)

GAIA: Lucifer. We need to talk.

LUCIFER: Gaia. Look.

GAIA: Now.

LUCIFER: Right there!

GAIA: Lucifer, I finally found you. We have serious matters to discuss. I don't have time—.

LUCIFER: Quickly!

GAIA: Lucifer. . . . (Looks.) It's a lagoon, a coral reef.

LUCIFER: Yes! Life and light and mindless slaughter. Now, right . . . there.

GAIA: We don't have time to . . . fine. That fish?

LUCIFER: Yes, but what kind of fish?

GAIA: Taxonomy is Michael's department.

LUCIFER: I'm not talking to Michael. It's called a tang, a blue tang.

GAIA: She's hiding. Fine, that's what she does.

LUCIFER: That's all she can do. All night, all day, she looks for cover, a hiding place, some tiny hole or crack in a reef crawling with predators. She can't outswim anything, can't defend herself. She can hide. That's her only evolutionary advantage.

GAIA: Well, she also lays thousands of eggs. And her hatchlings are good at hiding too, and good at laying more eggs. I really don't see what—.

LUCIFER: Okay, now, next exhibit. Right there.

GAIA: That shark?

LUCIFER: The shark, yes! Gristle and cartilage and rows of teeth, a killing, feeding machine. The fish and the shark, they were both intelligences.

GAIA: I know the argument you're—.

LUCIFER: Sharks, big and stupid; lagoon fish, smaller but smarter. So which would you rather be?

GAIA: They get the same mortality.

LUCIFER: The same mortality, yes! They're intelligences, like we are. They need bodies, like we do! So how is this fair—how does one get to be a predator and the other one prey?

GAIA: So the reports we've heard are true.

LUCIFER: Engage with me! Talk to me; hear my arguments. Make arguments of your own.

GAIA: I am. (Intensely.) There's a plan; we've all agreed to it.

LUCIFER: So we can't change our minds? Look at that fish. An intelligence.

GAIA: A limited one. "I'm hungry." "I'm scared."

LUCIFER: Capable of growth, like me, like you.

GAIA: You're growing? Or just changing your mind?

LUCIFER: (Taken aback at this.) All I do is talk to people. All I do, all day long.

GAIA: Preaching against the plan.

LUCIFER; Not really. All the ways the plan doesn't work.

GAIA: It's beautiful.

LUCIFER: That's sick.

GAIA: To me, it is. My earth, it's beautiful.

LUCIFER: Yours? You helped, that's all.

GAIA: Helped, you're right. I was lead engineer; I have come to think of it as mine, as most of us have. I do love it so.

LUCIFER: I remember you down there, stirring the soup.

GAIA: I spent millennia gathering the elements, methane, ammonia, hydrogen.

LUCIFER: You wasted millennia.

GAIA: Look what we did, though. Amino acids to proteins to life! We filled a world with life!

LUCIFER: Disgusting, most of it. Mites and bacteria and slime molds.

GAIA: And fish. And sharks.

LUCIFER: Yes! Hail, Gaia, earth's mother! Creator of violence and death.

GAIA: Author of necessity.

LUCIFER: Well, I see your world. I see a shark and a fish. That's what it comes down to. Sharks and fish, predators and victims. Violent and bloody and so unfair.

GAIA: You don't really care about that fish. You care about how her life affects you.

LUCIFER: You didn't know her until I pointed her out.

GAIA: I know that she wanted a body. She wanted a chance to learn.

LUCIFER: And there. She's dead. She just died. That bigger fish just ate her.

GAIA: And the shark will eat the bigger fish. That's how it works.

LUCIFER: So which would you rather be?

GAIA: They're equal, Lucifer. Equally blessed, equally cherished.

LUCIFER: Cherished!

GAIA: You know that's true. HE loves them all.

LUCIFER: So HE sent them down to this horror show. Where we're going, right? Pain and sickness and violence and death.

GAIA: You're such a coward.

LUCIFER: Okay, if that's what you're reduced to—

GAIA: You're a crybaby, Lucifer. Whine whine. "Oh, I'm so scared. Oh, it's going to hurt! Oh, I'm going to get an owie on my pinkie!"

LUCIFER: You don't know what pain is.

GAIA: Nor do you! We're just these shapes, incorporeal. We can't actually feel much of anything.

LUCIFER: I like my shape.

GAIA: So why does every single intelligence, when they've died, when they get back here, why does every single one miss it? Because they do.

LUCIFER: They're stupid.

GAIA: Your shark friend will be back here soon enough. Say that to him; tell him how dumb he is. Let me know when; I wanna watch.

LUCIFER: He can't really hurt me. *(But he looks around uneasily.)*

GAIA: Wanna bet?

LUCIFER: You think I'm just afraid. Of pain and difficulty. I'm not. I just see what I see.

GAIA: We all can see the same world. We just don't dwell on the worst bits of it. *(Pause.)*

LUCIFER: When are you going?

GAIA: None of us know.

LUCIFER: Don't give me that. You're in the inner circle. No way you don't know.

GAIA: I've heard . . . soon.

LUCIFER: With Michael. Gaia and Michael, the first two. I knew that, see. I still know things, too.

GAIA: Fine, you know things. Good for you.

LUCIFER: It's almost ready, isn't it? After all these years, all that death and preparation. It's about time.

GAIA: Men. And women.

LUCIFER: Us. And it'll be comfortable at first. You and Michael in that garden. And then you'll get to choose, won't you? You'll leave your garden, and you'll suffer, and you'll think it was your idea.

GAIA: It will be.



LUCIFER: (*Shouts it.*) Sure! As long as HE gets to keep HIS hands clean!

GAIA: We agreed! We said we wanted this!

LUCIFER: We didn't know!

GAIA: We knew enough!

LUCIFER: *Not me!* (*Pause.*)

GAIA: It could have been you in the garden. It was between you and Michael.

LUCIFER: Not Yahweh?

GAIA: You know his role. You've become this great baby, so afraid of pain, and look at him. Look at what he'll suffer.

LUCIFER: More pain, the key to the plan.

GAIA: He agreed to it, and I honor him; I even think about him, and I wish I could weep, and you—.

LUCIFER: I'm important too! Don't talk about him, I'm just as important as he is! I'm in the inner circle!

GAIA: Yes. You are.

LUCIFER: I don't know what I'm going to be doing yet, but it's got to be important. People listen to me!

GAIA: Which is why it'd be nice if you talked sense.

LUCIFER: Maybe I'll even be with you, there, in that garden.

GAIA: It'll just be us two. To begin with.

LUCIFER: Three's a crowd. I'd be intruding. An unwelcome guest.

GAIA: Something like that.

LUCIFER: Sounds good. Sounds fun.

GAIA: I'm not going to argue anymore. (*She starts to go.*)

LUCIFER: Do you remember the meteor?

GAIA: Of course I do.

LUCIFER: Those poor dying creatures. Huge, lumbering; all that's left of them now is my shark.

GAIA: Lobsters. Alligators.

LUCIFER: They weren't all stupid; there were higher intelligences with some self-awareness, some sense of family and protecting the young and . . .

GAIA: Lucifer, I remember.

LUCIFER: Do you remember that how that felt, watching? Everywhere, creatures choking to death. They couldn't breathe; they could hardly move, and no idea why. There they were, feeding and propagating. Suddenly, smash. The air turning lethal. And they fell, by the millions, billions.

GAIA: Gabriel protected those he could.

LUCIFER: Gabriel. Mr. Cataclysm.

GAIA: That's his role. Once the dominant species reaches an evolutionary dead end . . .

LUCIFER: I've heard the lecture—.

GAIA: Other species with greater potential—.

LUCIFER: Those mammals, sure.

GAIA: They come under Gabriel's protection, and we, well, we . . .

LUCIFER: Allow something through.

GAIA: We allow something through. And in time, Gabriel's role will form the heart of a beautiful myth. A poet will celebrate it: a boat, a flood, a family. A true enough reflection of his function in earth history.

I see your world. I see a shark and a fish.  
That's what it comes down to.



LUCIFER: And what of the brutality that poetry conceals, living souls choking out their lives in flood and firestorm?

GAIA: I trust HIM. HE's been right every time.

LUCIFER: The plan. Always the plan.

GAIA: It's beautiful.

LUCIFER: Yes, of course you think that, anything HE wants—.

GAIA: The plan has a kind of tragic beauty, yes. Somber and quiet and reverent.

LUCIFER: Words that shouldn't be spoken so glibly.

GAIA: We have all seen death. We don't all lose our perspective.

LUCIFER: Ah, yes, perspective, I certainly have that. (*Pause. She scrutinizes him.*)

GAIA: They say you won't go.

LUCIFER: Is that what they say?

GAIA: They say you're telling people that none of us should go.

LUCIFER: You have good sources.

GAIA: Lucifer, you're too *bright* for this. You've always been favored.

LUCIFER: Kill and be killed; eat and be eaten. Savage struggles for survival, enemies everywhere. That's what we face, right? Except it's different for us.

GAIA: For humans, more is expected.

LUCIFER: That's the heart of it; there's the rub. Every other species, every single one, essentially without exception, lives by instinct, survival and propagation. And then they die, and they get back here, right? Every single lesser intelligence. And what do they get? Pat on the back, good and faithful servant, you fulfilled the measure of your creation.

GAIA: Because they did.

LUCIFER: And then it's our turn. Michael first. And you. And the rest of us.

GAIA: Yes.

LUCIFER: And the rules will suddenly change! We'll still get instincts; we'll still want to protect ourselves; we'll still want to procreate. But we get an added twist, won't we?

GAIA: More will be expected of us.

LUCIFER: We'll have to think things through. We'll have to make decisions. We'll have to live by rules, rules that don't apply to *any other intelligence*. And we're going to be judged! Someone up here's going to be keeping tally on us!

GAIA: That's right. That's our test.

LUCIFER: And because we'll have bodies, we won't want to get hurt. We've seen it, how creatures stay away from danger. Except us, avoiding pain won't be enough for us. Sometimes, we'll be judged if we don't choose pain. We could even be expected to make choices that increase pain. How is that fair?

GAIA: If the test isn't difficult—.

LUCIFER: You're as smart as I am. Why can't you think this through? We're being set up to fail!

GAIA: Think it through. So we're to think for ourselves here, but not down there? We're to make decisions, and live by consequences here, but only here? Not down there.

LUCIFER: We can do it here.

GAIA: We can do it there, too.

LUCIFER: No, and here's why—.

GAIA: You've seen it a billion times! Having a body doesn't change the essential—.

LUCIFER: Here, no one's trying to kill us. Here, we're not suffering, or in danger.

GAIA: Well, pain is an experience we can't have right now. That's one of the reasons we need bodies.

LUCIFER: And to make choices.

GAIA: Some of us won't really have to face many choices. How many will die as children? And how about me?

LUCIFER: What about you?

GAIA: I'm a woman. Everything we've heard, our opportunities are going to be pretty limited, most of us, most of the time.

LUCIFER: You're not horrified by that thought?

GAIA: Horrified at being a woman?

LUCIFER: The unfairness of it.

GAIA: I'll still be free to choose. Maybe I won't be free to choose the contexts for those choices, but there will always be choices I can make.

LUCIFER: You think.

GAIA: I know.

LUCIFER: Well, fine. If the point is to have bodies, let's go down. We'll have a miserable few years, and soon enough we'll get eaten. Fine, if that's completely necessary.

GAIA: HE says it is.

LUCIFER: Well, HE should know. But I wanna be a shark.

GAIA: You would be so bored as a shark . . .

LUCIFER: Hey, it's a body. But it's a pretty awesome, scary body. Big, strong, lives longer, suffers less! Look at that body you're stuck with.

GAIA: I've seen them, early hominids are still evolving, but—  
 LUCIFER: Hairless, clawless, almost toothless. Weak, sickly, scrawny, and you, you're a woman, once a month you're going to have to—  
 GAIA: I've seen what our bodies are going to be. Shaped like my shape, more or less.  
 LUCIFER: Well, not for me! Screw that!  
 GAIA: Don't say things like—  
 LUCIFER: Just let us be like the other animals. Live by instinct, kill or be killed, eat and be eaten. Don't make us choose things. Don't make us responsible.  
 GAIA: And you'd be satisfied with that?  
 LUCIFER: Hey, I think I'd do fine. Kill when I have to, and hide the rest of the time. Sounds good to me.  
 GAIA: And what would you learn? *(Pause.)*  
 LUCIFER: Are you going to tell me to stop talking to people?  
 GAIA: I'll be talking to them afterwards.  
 LUCIFER: Then do me a favor. Tell HIM something for me. Tell HIM I know.  
 GAIA: What do you know?  
 LUCIFER: What HIS was like. HIS probation. I've seen it.  
 GAIA: That's not possible.  
 LUCIFER: Hey, you said I was bright.  
 GAIA: Show me.  
 LUCIFER: You sure?  
 GAIA: Show me!  
 LUCIFER: HE was nothing special. I figured, you know, HE was probably a king, or an artist, or someone really important. But no. See for yourself. *(LUCIFER steps back. GAIA looks.)* HE's twenty, MOTHER was sixteen. They have two children. They sleep on some straw on a dirt floor. They eat with wooden forks. They're no one. They have nothing.  
 GAIA: That's FATHER.  
 LUCIFER: There HE is. This is as old as HE ever got. He married at seventeen, normal in that day. These guys came by. They had some dispute with HIS master, and they took it out on his slaves. There. *(GAIA recoils from the view in utter horror.)* HE fought back as best HE could. But you can see. It was over pretty quickly.  
 GAIA: Why would you show me this?  
 LUCIFER: To show you how hypocritical this all is! Look at HIM? HE did nothing! HE was nobody! Someone to be slaughtered.  
 GAIA: HE loved HER. Look how HE fought for HER.  
 LUCIFER: Yes, HE loved! But look at HIM. Worked half to death, with nothing to show for it. How could HE make any choices at all? How was HE judged? HE's sending us down as a test? To think, to grow, to learn? Well, what did HE ever learn? How was HE really human?  
 GAIA: And you don't see that?  
 LUCIFER: I see a peasant being bludgeoned to death.  
 GAIA: No! A man, in love. A man who cared for his family! Powerless and weak, perhaps, but look at the choices HE made nonetheless!  
 LUCIFER: I see an animal slaughtered. And I don't think it's

fair for me to have to live up to some higher standard than that.

GAIA: Is that all you can see? How unfair things are to you?  
 LUCIFER: Fair's fair, and HE's not being fair. And I'm telling everyone, and some already believe me.  
 GAIA: So it's true. When Yahweh told me—  
 LUCIFER: Yahweh, what did he say about me?  
 GAIA: He said there was a role in the plan for you. An important role, a necessary role. But a terrible one. And you had to choose it, and you could decide not to, but . . . *(She stops.)*  
 LUCIFER: What? I could decide not to, but what?  
 GAIA: But that you probably wouldn't.  
 LUCIFER: Well. Now I am intrigued. What great role is this?  
 GAIA: The tempter. The destroyer. The opposition.  
 LUCIFER: That's what they've ordained for me?  
 GAIA: It's not ordained! It's not something HE can ordain! But they see the way you're heading, and it makes . . . some sense.  
 LUCIFER: So it looks like I'll be in the garden with you after all.  
 GAIA: You don't have to! This is still something you can decide not to do!  
 LUCIFER: Hey, this is great. For once, they're taking me seriously.  
 GAIA: Lucifer, you've seen FATHER'S mortality! When you look at that life, that short, painful, loving life, you feel no compassion?  
 LUCIFER: I feel nothing but contempt. And you still think HE's great, don't you?  
 GAIA: More than ever.  
 LUCIFER: What a sentimental weakling you are.  
 GAIA: And I had no idea you'd fallen so far.  
 LUCIFER: Fallen? You just said it, I'm essential! I'm needed!  
 GAIA: I'm so sorry, Lucifer.  
 LUCIFER: Hey, you tell 'em from me. I'll still go! If they want me to, I'll go. But on my terms!  
 GAIA: Goodbye.  
 LUCIFER: I want to be a shark! If I have to go, I'll go as a shark, big and strong and a predator! But no choices! None of this testing ground for me! No sir, I go as a shark, pure instinct, or I don't go at all! You tell them! That's my last offer! *(She exits.)* So unfair. So not right.  
*(Blackout.)*

## BATHSHEBA

*(BATHSHEBA lays flat on her back in bed, fists clenched. DAVID plays the lyre, a mournful tune. He finishes. He waits for her response.)*

DAVID: *(After a moment.)* Did you like it?  
 BATHSHEBA: It's pretty.  
 DAVID: I thought it would please you.  
 BATHSHEBA: It does, then. Very much.

DAVID: I wrote it for you. In your praise.  
 BATHSHEBA: Thoughtful.  
 DAVID: You seem pale. Distracted.  
 BATHSHEBA: Do I?  
 DAVID: Is something wrong?  
 BATHSHEBA: Is something wrong. *(Pause.)* I'm here, you're playing music for me, and I don't know anything. Outside this room, I'm completely . . . Can I even leave? Am I . . . free?  
 DAVID: You're free.  
 BATHSHEBA: Whatever you mean by that. Look, there are things I need to ask you, and I don't know how to except just to ask.  
 DAVID: All right.  
 BATHSHEBA: *(Taking the plunge.)* He's dead, isn't he?  
 DAVID: Uriah. *(Pause.)* I'm sorry. I meant to break it gently. Yes. He's dead. *(She gives a great shuddering sigh of relief.)* I received word from Joab, just before dinner.  
 BATHSHEBA: So I'm a widow.  
 DAVID: *(Reaches to embrace her.)* I'm so very sorry.  
 BATHSHEBA: *(Holding him off.)* I'm in mourning.  
 DAVID: *(Stops.)* Of course.  
 BATHSHEBA: I'm a widow. I'm his widow. Those are the facts now. Things have changed, and I need to know where we go from here.  
 DAVID: You need time, I understand. I'll leave you to your thoughts.  
 BATHSHEBA: No! Look, I'm pregnant, and I'm a widow, and everyone knows the child isn't his. So what now? What's the plan?  
 DAVID: You're a widow; you go back to the home of your father. *(She laughs, close to hysterics.)* Most of our people don't find our law so amusing.  
 BATHSHEBA: Back to my father? You'd rather not kill me yourself. You'd rather he took care of it?  
 DAVID: You're distracted. Mourn: we'll talk tomorrow.  
 BATHSHEBA: You had him killed. Uriah, you ordered his death.  
 DAVID: He died in battle.  
 BATHSHEBA: Yes, that would be the spin.  
 DAVID: He died in battle. That's the truth. *(Starts to leave.)* I'm intruding.  
 BATHSHEBA: My father arranged my marriage to Uriah when I was thirteen. I was informed of it the day before it took place. I met him for the first time under the wedding canopy. I had sex with him, a complete stranger to me, that night, as was required of me.  
 DAVID: And then, in time, you grew to love him.  
 BATHSHEBA: My father beat me when I displeased him. Uriah beat me as well; I displeased him more often. *(DAVID recoils at the thought.)* Nine years, nine years of barrenness, despite his best exertions. Of course, I displeased him.  
 DAVID: I believe it shameful to strike a woman.  
 BATHSHEBA: Well, you're the king. You might want to let that be known.  
 DAVID: Perhaps in a psalm.

BATHSHEBA: Poetry! Yes, that will settle things. What do you want me to do?  
 DAVID: Mourn first; then we'll—  
 BATHSHEBA: Fine, I'll mourn, I'll sit shiva, I'll cover up the mirrors. I may even rend my dress, after I've changed into something I don't like as much.  
 DAVID: He was a good man, a convert to our ways.  
 BATHSHEBA: He embodied your ways. I existed to please him, and I didn't, and paid for it.  
 DAVID: I could send for your friends, someone to sit with you.  
 BATHSHEBA: I have no friends!  
 DAVID: Women of your household, perhaps, or—  
 BATHSHEBA: I have maidservants who fear me as much as I feared Uriah, and with as good cause. My sisters are married and gone; my mother is dead. I have sufficient status to bar the door to my father, and I do. And now, you're going to send me back to him?  
 DAVID: Am I your friend?  
 BATHSHEBA: Is that what you want?  
 DAVID: Very much.  
 BATHSHEBA: You don't want me in your bed?  
 DAVID: Well, I do find you . . . alluring.  
 BATHSHEBA: So which do you want? Friendship or sex?  
 DAVID: Well . . . do I really need to choose between them? Given our circumstances. *(She laughs again.)* Again I amuse you.  
 BATHSHEBA: Protect me! I'll do anything you tell me to!  
 DAVID: I would rather serve you.  
 BATHSHEBA: Serve me? You want to serve me? *(Her laugh has a panicky edge.)* David, I know you mean well, but you say things like that, and I don't know where I stand. *(Pause.)* He slept outside my door.  
 DAVID: *(Pause.)* Yes.  
 BATHSHEBA: I know you think I'm a fool. I'm a woman, and we're all fools. But I was barren until I knew you, and then I was barren no more. I know what I told you, and when I told it to you. I know when he came home, and I know what everyone knew, where he slept that night.  
 DAVID: You have no real proof of any—  
 BATHSHEBA: You had him murdered because your child was growing in my belly and everyone knew it couldn't possibly be his!  
 DAVID: I did nothing of the—  
 BATHSHEBA: And why you don't just kill me, too, I have no idea. It would make everything so—  
 DAVID: Do you interrupt your king?  
 BATHSHEBA: And now he's a king again. Friend, king, or murderous lover, which is it to be?  
 DAVID: *(Stands.)* You will respect your king!  
 BATHSHEBA: My king? Or the man who killed my husband? *(They glare at each other.)* If you're going to kill me, I'd rather you did it. Not my father. I have sisters.  
 DAVID: Your father would never—  
 BATHSHEBA: My father's a priest. We both know what he'll do the second I walk in the door.



DAVID: You'll be under the king's protection.

BATHSHEBA: As was Uriah.

DAVID: You're a woman. Uriah was a soldier. It's a different . . .

BATHSHEBA: You told him to come home. And he did, but wasn't that just Uriah all over, ostentatiously sleeping outside the house to satisfy some niggling point of honor.

DAVID: I sent him home because I was worried what people would say. Wagging tongues—.

BATHSHEBA: Yes, I'm terrified of gossip.

DAVID: I wanted your reputation—.

BATHSHEBA: The penalty for an adulterous wife is death. By stoning. A law enforced by your priests, under your orders. *(A pause.)*

DAVID: You were not in any real jeopardy.

BATHSHEBA: Not in jeopardy! I couldn't hide it much longer, and my husband was at war! You send him home, he sleeps outside my house where everyone could see, and that was it. That was my death sentence!

DAVID: I would have protected you.

BATHSHEBA: You did protect me, you sent him to battle. No, not just to battle. To an assault, on a fortified city's walls.

BATHSHEBA: And that's another way to win a fight.

DAVID: What do you want from me? A confession? Yes, I ordered the assault.

BATHSHEBA: Led by Uriah.

DAVID: He's an able commander.

BATHSHEBA: With a wife pregnant by you. And so you had him killed. You gave the order, knowing Joab would carry it out. Good old Joab, so vicious and so necessary. You killed Uriah so you could have me to yourself. Admit that, at least.

DAVID: All right! *(Long pause.)* Yes. God forgive me. *(Pause.)* Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Out of a full heart, my God, take away my sin.

BATHSHEBA: You even do that beautifully.

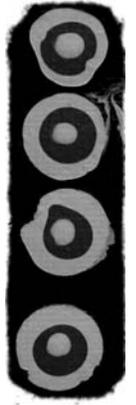
DAVID: Repentance?

BATHSHEBA: Heroic noble suffering.

DAVID: And of course you don't want me in your bed, the man who killed your husband? You have every right to despise me.



Because Uriah was my husband,  
given his position, I could  
neither refuse nor accept your  
invitation without forfeiting my life.



Right? You ordered Joab to send Uriah on a suicide mission.

DAVID: A gamble, hope for a breakthrough.

BATHSHEBA: Oh, it was a gamble, all right. What if it hadn't worked? What if he had taken the city? What would the story have been? The hero of the army, and his cheating tramp of a wife.

DAVID: Then I would have confessed my sin before the people.

BATHSHEBA: I'm just imagining it. This great public gesture, David the hero-warrior-poet-king, making some grandiose *mea culpa* in the public square. And who takes the blame? The slut. The harlot. The evil, evil temptress.

DAVID: I would have taken the blame entirely on myself.

BATHSHEBA: I swoon at your nobility. *(She turns on him.)* You gambled with my life! And what was at stake for you? A tiny blemish on the reputation of the ruddy shepherd boy who killed Goliath. Nothing! Nothing!

DAVID: You're distraught. Your husband is dead, and you're mad with grief. I'll leave you alone. *(He starts to go.)*

BATHSHEBA: I don't have time to despise you. But let me guess. In time, you hope I might grow to love you.

DAVID: Yes.

BATHSHEBA: See? Romantic clichés for every occasion.

DAVID: I love you.

BATHSHEBA: Fine, I love you too.

DAVID: Do you mean it?

BATHSHEBA: While my life . . . ? *(Catches herself.)* You bet I mean it. Absolutely. David loves Bathsheba, Bathsheba loves Da—.

DAVID: I don't understand you! Your husband is dead; I've just admitted killing him. You could be frantic with despair; you could fly at me in rage; you could angrily vow revenge. Or, as a lover might, throw yourself in my arms, kiss me in gratitude. But you, you—.

BATHSHEBA: I don't know how to react! One situation's resolved, but still I don't know where things stand.

DAVID: You helped create it. Let's not forget the choices you made.

BATHSHEBA: Choices?

DAVID: You chose to bathe on the roof. Knowing it could only be seen from my palace, you chose to disrobe, and bathe.

BATHSHEBA: I see, setting off a chain of events that would eventually force you to murder?

DAVID: If you're willing to look honestly at your role—

BATHSHEBA: I took a bath!

DAVID: Hoping I would see you. Hoping I would desire you. You had influence. I know women, nagging and begging. For all I know, you even persuaded Uriah to purchase a house close enough to my palace—

BATHSHEBA: Oh, don't flatter yourself. *(Pause.)*

DAVID: But you did bathe, and where only I could see you.

BATHSHEBA: Where only birds could see me! I never even considered your palace.

DAVID: Very well. But you also came to my bed, of your own free will. I didn't rape you. You chose to come to me.

BATHSHEBA: I chose not to die.

DAVID: When I invited you, you could have refused.

BATHSHEBA: From the moment I walked in your palace, no, earlier, from the second I received your invitation, my life was essentially over! Don't you see that?

DAVID: *(Pause.)* I had not considered it.

BATHSHEBA: A messenger, sent from the palace, heard by one servant, who told another servant, who told me. "Mistress! You've been sent for by the king!" And not just any king, David, loved by the people, our greatest warrior and poet and singer and prophet and hero. And my husband's commander! "But no," I say, "I don't think I want to, I think he may try to sleep with me. I have, after all, been bathing naked on the roof."

DAVID: You could have said, "No, I'm not free to come."

BATHSHEBA: The king commands, and I obey.

DAVID: No! I'm not that kind of monarch; people are free to turn down my invitations.

BATHSHEBA: Not me!

DAVID: No one would have thought—

BATHSHEBA: They're Uriah's servants! Not mine. They tell him, "She was invited to the palace, but she refused to go. She chose to dishonor your king's invitation." Don't think I'm overstating this: he would kill me. He would beat me to death, or as close to it as he dared.

DAVID: But if you suspected that my reason for inviting you—

BATHSHEBA: Then he would beat me for inspiring such thoughts in you. Uriah was not a brute by inclination, but I was his property and never allowed to forget it.

DAVID: Our law forbids—

BATHSHEBA: Our law! Ask the women of your kingdom how much force your law has behind closed doors!

DAVID: I am trying to change things.

BATHSHEBA: I've noticed. Every new war against the Philistines, I think: yay! another blow for women!

DAVID: Still, no man should treat his wife—

BATHSHEBA: What do you know of it? He never wanted to

hurt me and was gentle at times. But if I obeyed him too quickly, I was servile. If too slowly, I was impudent. If his bath was too warm, or his food too salty, it was I who was punished, though I neither drew his baths nor cooked his meals.

DAVID: I knew Uriah. I can't believe that he would ever—

BATHSHEBA: He did as most men do. Better than some, worse than a few.

DAVID: No. Look at you here, so furious, so independent. How could your marriage—?

BATHSHEBA: I had to cling to something. All I had was me. *(Pause.)*

DAVID: I thought, perhaps, when you came to the palace that day, that it was because of love.

BATHSHEBA: When was I ever free to love?

DAVID: You're free now.

BATHSHEBA: I'm really not.

DAVID: You are. You could walk out that door tonight.

BATHSHEBA: After how many servants have seen me here?

DAVID: What do you want? Do you want me to marry you?

BATHSHEBA: Yes! There's safety in marriage!

DAVID: And a partner, a friend.

BATHSHEBA: More romantic nonsense.

DAVID: I am falling in love with you!

BATHSHEBA: And I'm just trying to survive. *(Pause.)*

DAVID: When we made love that first time, when we lay in each other's arms—

BATHSHEBA: I know.

DAVID: I kissed away a tear.

BATHSHEBA: Yes.

DAVID: You're saying you felt nothing?

BATHSHEBA: You were very tender. Considerate. I'd never known that before.

DAVID: I sent for you. But even when we were alone together, you could have said no.

BATHSHEBA: You stood.

DAVID: When?

BATHSHEBA: When I came into the room. You were sitting, and you stood up, and looked at me. As a courtesy.

DAVID: I don't remember.

BATHSHEBA: I do. I had reached a moment of decision. Because Uriah was my husband, given his position, I could neither refuse nor accept your invitation without forfeiting my life. I had steeled myself to seduce you; I thought perhaps you might be sentimental enough to protect a lover. A desperate gamble, I know, but the only one open to me. But then you stood.

DAVID: So that first time, we really did make love.

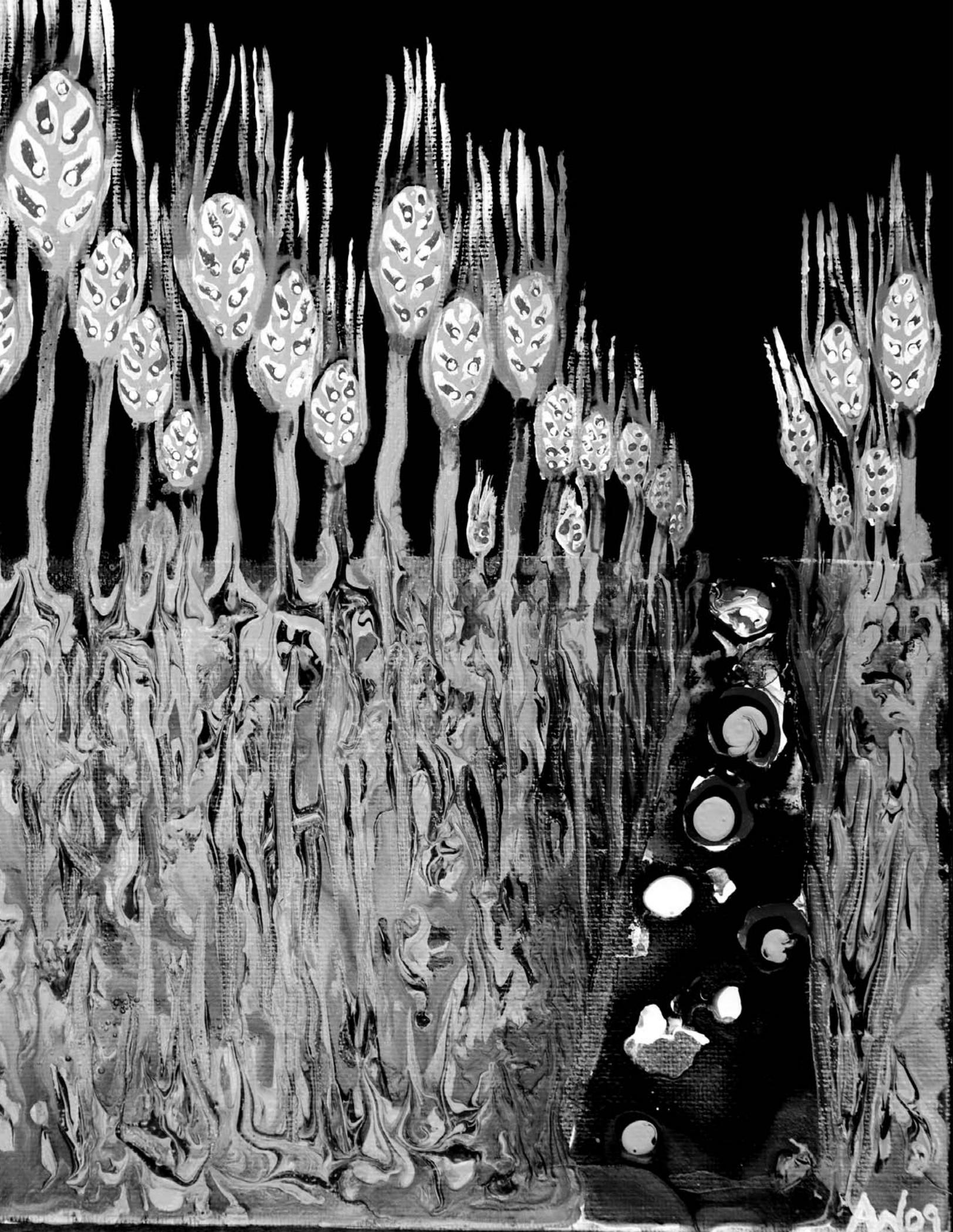
BATHSHEBA: Something close to it, perhaps. *(Pause.)* You'll really marry me? It's the only way I'll feel safe.

DAVID: First, I need to know: why did you bathe on your roof?

BATHSHEBA: First I need to know if you'll marry me.

DAVID: *(After a moment's consideration.)* All right.

BATHSHEBA: Then I'm free to tell you the truth. Ah, David, it was a perfect night. Uriah was off to war and would be



Arlo

## RUTH IN THE HOUSE OF BOAZ

gone for weeks, perhaps. I had eaten well, not bread soaked in olive oil the way Uriah likes it, but warm and crusty and fresh, and a good goat's milk cheese. It had rained that morning, and the air was shimmering clear, and the sun was just going down. And on the roof, I could look out, I could see the sky and the clouds and the city fires. I thought of my room, my stuffy, cramped little room. I took a basin and some clean clothes. And felt free.

DAVID: That's all.

BATHSHEBA: That's all.

DAVID: But then you came to see me. You accepted my invitation.

BATHSHEBA: Yes, I made a choice. I did. I chose not to be beaten. If that choice damns me, then heaven must be out of all our reach.

DAVID: Yes.

BATHSHEBA: But one thing came of it I do not regret. It's given me a chance at love. Real love. To see what that feels like.

DAVID: With me!?

BATHSHEBA: No. Sorry.

DAVID: Then with who?

BATHSHEBA: I'm going to be a mother.

DAVID: So finally, I must ask. Did you know I was there? Did you know I could see you?

BATHSHEBA: *(Smiles at him.)* Things aren't always about you.

DAVID: I remember seeing you, though. You smiled, I remember. I looked at that smile. And I drew conclusions, and I made choices. I'll be damned for them, I think.

BATHSHEBA: We may both be damned.

DAVID: It might be worth it. If I knew you loved me.

BATHSHEBA: Eternal damnation? All for your love for me?

DAVID: Yes.

BATHSHEBA: Then it was never really love, was it? *(Pause. And suddenly DAVID realizes what damnation means.)* David. I'm not saying this to hurt your feelings. But you get to be king. You get to rule, absolute power, life-and-death power. And a palace and riches and fame and poetic talent and . . . you're even pretty good looking. You don't get all that, and also get to be loved by me. Not true love, not equal love. 'Cause if it's not equal, if it's just about a pretty body and who has power and who doesn't . . . it's not really love. Is it?

DAVID: Well, I just don't accept that.

BATHSHEBA: David. I wept. I wept, because in what we did, there was tenderness, and kindness and consideration, and those were all new to me. But what we did . . . it wasn't blessed. Was it?

DAVID: I don't know.

BATHSHEBA: And maybe that's why you wept too?

DAVID: *(Can't answer. Breaks down a little, controls himself.)* I'm sorry I killed your husband.

BATHSHEBA: I'm sorry, too.

*(Slow blackout.)*

*(RUTH lies by the bed of BOAZ. She looks away from him as she speaks. As he wakes, they turn away from each other; their lines are their thoughts. Only when they look at each other do they speak to each other.)*

RUTH: He's still asleep. I could just leave. I don't think anyone saw me come in, and if I'm very quiet, I could slip out and no one would know I was here. Yes. Yes.

*(She starts to get up.)*

RUTH: No. Don't lose your nerve, you're just scared. Naomi said it was okay. Besides, where would I go? Back to Naomi? She'll ask what happened, and I'll have to tell her what a coward I am. She won't despise me, I don't think. She never has, even when Mahlon married me, which I know disappointed her, her son with a Moabite, rejecting his own people and God, but no, never a word, she's been my great friend throughout. Oh! He's stirring! I don't like this! Leave! Run! *(She starts to get up.)* Calm yourself. Calm down. *(She stands, irresolute.)* What's the worst that could happen? He could misunderstand. He could laugh at me. Or he could kick me out and tell us we can't glean from his fields anymore. Or . . . *(An appalling possibility.)* He could understand all too well. I'm here, at his bedside, brazen like a harlot. He's a man, after all. He could . . . do as men do. Take his pleasure. And what could I do but consent? I am here, after all. I chose to sneak into his bedchamber, lay myself down, uncover his feet. Pretty much just inviting him to. . . *(She starts to go.)* This was foolishness. I trust Naomi. She knows the customs here. But customs are just customs, and men have their desires. And if the worst should happen, I'm no blushing virgin. I was married. But a widow is respectable; a widow can hold her head up. I'm a stranger, but I am an honorable woman. I am no strumpet. Some things are just wrong. *(Firmly preparing to leave.)* I must leave; I have no choice. And I suppose that probably means leaving Naomi, too, and returning, as Orpah did, home, to my own land and people. If my choices are poverty or dishonor, I know which I choose. Orpah will take me in. *(Considers it.)* Orpah. My sister. Who left poor Naomi to grieve alone, after losing her husband, losing two sons. After vowing to stay with her. That's who I want to be? Another Orpah? *(She sits.)* And what reason do I have to distrust Naomi? Or distrust the family of Elimelech? These are good people, caring and kind, and they've taught me so much, about the lovingkindness of Yahweh. Naomi said this was a right and proper act, though that seems quite impossible, and even terribly dangerous. But Naomi knows their ways. Besides . . . *(She looks down at BOAZ, still sleeping.)* Does he really seem so frightening? When he told his servants to let us glean his barley, he spoke so softly and kindly. Perhaps he is different from other men.

Maybe this will be all right. (*BOAZ stirs again.*) Oh! He's waking! Pretend to be asleep! (*She lies quickly down and feigns sleep. BOAZ wakes. He sees her.*)

BOAZ: What in the world? (*He looks her over.*) She shouldn't be here. (*Gently shakes her shoulder.*) Miss? Miss? (*RUTH continues to pretend she's asleep.*) Of all the strange situations . . . Do I know her? (*Looks her over carefully.*) I saw her gleaning from my fields. The Moabite. Daughter-in-law to the one who was gone and returned, Naomi. Yes, I remember. She's the one. We talked briefly; she spoke so softly and well. And the others wanted to make fun of her accent, and her looks and ways, but that wasn't right. She's a loyal friend to her mother-in-law, and they ought to have respected that. But what is she doing here? Could she have misunderstood? Could she have thought I was inviting her to be with me, as a woman and a man, together? Does she really think so little of me, to think I'd want her that way? A poor woman giving herself to me, a man of means? (*He looks her over again.*) But wait. Naomi, the one who left. The one she takes care of. She's kin to me, is she not? Distant kin, perhaps, but we share . . . an uncle, perhaps? Are we in some way cousins? So is this about my obligation to her? (*A little angry.*) So this is a demand, is it? An insolent ultimatum. The arrogance of it: support me, your kinswoman, or else. Or else what? What will she do to me; who can she turn to? I'll show her how power works in Israel. (*Shakes her again.*) Wake up! (*RUTH sits up, frightened, and turns away from him. HE turns away from her as well.*)

BOAZ: She certainly doesn't look insolent.

RUTH: He's going to hit me!

BOAZ: She looks frightened.

RUTH: (*Closes her eyes.*) Please! Don't!

BOAZ: She's cringing away from me.

RUTH: Please!

BOAZ: (*Backs away.*) She's afraid of me.

RUTH: Please! No!

BOAZ: What a terrible thought, that a poor widow would be afraid of me.

RUTH: He's so angry, he can't even speak. (*She dares to open her eyes, quickly glance at him and then away.*) He's moved away from me. In sheer disgust, from the look on his face. Who can blame him? An honorable man, finding a wanton woman in his bedchamber.

BOAZ: She's as frightened as a mouse. Of me.

RUTH: I'll just go. This can't get more humiliating. (*She starts to leave.*)

BOAZ: (*To her.*) Wait. (*She stops, surprised. He turns away again.*) Why did I do that? What can I possibly want with her?

RUTH: What does he want from me now?

BOAZ: I can at least feed her before she goes.

RUTH: What does he want me to do?

BOAZ: Wait, I said. And I know what she's thinking. She thinks I'm going to make her a proposition—an indecent one.

RUTH: He thinks he knows what I came here for.

BOAZ: She's a woman. I'm a man. Most men would take advantage of her, and even if she's the sort who has given in to them in the past, I can't see her as a harlot now. Not with the fear in those eyes. And look at how she holds herself. Not the strutting confidence of a woman of the night. I've seen them when I've done business in the cities, the brazenness of their stance, the way they advertise themselves. But not this one. She's cringing away from me. She can hardly bear to look my way.

RUTH: Why hasn't he spoken? If he wants what I think he wants, he would have made me an offer by now. I would think. Unless he's inexperienced in these matters. "These matters," as though I know anything of that kind of life. But still, he holds back. Almost as though he's unsure.

BOAZ: Could it be something else?

RUTH: Could he want something different?

BOAZ: I know how poor she is. She didn't speak of it yesterday, but I saw how ravenously she dug into her barley-cake, after she'd given the older woman something to eat. Perhaps I could give her some money. Perhaps this is simply a Moabite way to beg.

RUTH: He hasn't called in his servants. He could have me thrown out, could perhaps even have me flogged as an example. But if he were going to do that, he would have by now.

BOAZ: What coins do I have in my purse?

RUTH: He wants to pay me for it. So I was right after all. He's inexperienced, but he's still just a man.

BOAZ: But she asked for nothing yesterday. Except gleaning privileges, which the Law requires of me anyway.

RUTH: See how he fumbles with his purse.

BOAZ: If a beggar begs, I give alms. But what of a beggar who doesn't beg? Does the Law require me to give anyway, even when I'm not asked?

RUTH: Maybe he doesn't know how much to ask for. I'm certainly not going to help him with that.

BOAZ: No. I don't think that's what she wants.

RUTH: (*Straightens.*) I can still leave with my dignity intact. (*Starts to go.*)

BOAZ: Wait! (*She stops. He turns away in confusion.*) She's here for a purpose, she's made a decision, and she wants me to make one, too. And I don't know what she wants, and I don't know how to ask her.

RUTH: Why doesn't he speak? What does he want?

BOAZ: And something important will come from what we decide. I feel that, too, that we stand on the cusp of something larger than either of us.

RUTH: Why does this moment feel so huge?

BOAZ: So think. She wants me to live up to my obligations.

RUTH: Now what does he want?

BOAZ: She's my kinswoman, and a widow. She wants me to marry her? Could that be it?

RUTH: He's put away the purse. Does he finally understand why I'm here?

BOAZ: It's impossible, of course. I'm old, twenty years her senior, if not more. I'm a fusty old bachelor, set in my ways, the town eccentric. I can't share my life with a woman.

RUTH: He doesn't find me attractive, of course. Not with my Moabite complexion, my nose and chin.

BOAZ: What could she possibly see in me? Hair gray and thinning, losing most of my teeth, a paunchy middle and a limp. No woman has ever found me attractive, and look at this one, so vibrant and alive.

RUTH: He's disgusted by what he sees.

BOAZ: And no matchmaker ever found me a woman I could consider. No one with my love for Yahweh, no one with my taste for reading and thinking.

RUTH: Even if he has an obligation towards me, do I want that? A man who marries out of duty, a man who marries because it's expected of him?

BOAZ: I've been content enough, with my friends and my books and my farm and my businesses. I've had a full and rich life, alone. Why complicate things?

RUTH: A wealthy man can always find his way out of an obligation.

BOAZ: If I were to marry, it certainly wouldn't be to a widow, someone who once shared another man's bed. I will not be compared, especially when I'm certain to be found deficient.

RUTH: And still he hesitates. He's kind enough to not mistreat me, but he can't find the words to send me away. It's best if I just go. *(She starts to leave.)*

BOAZ: Wait! *(She stops again.)* What would Yahweh have me do?

RUTH: They worship Yahweh; they're kind to strangers.

BOAZ: When I spoke to her yesterday, she spoke of Yahweh with such devotion. The twilight lit up her face, her voice, soft and gentle.

RUTH: Could this be about their God?

BOAZ: What does the Law say?

RUTH: I've barely learned of their God; there's no place for me here.

BOAZ: I could ask my cousin to take her on. She'd be his

RUTH: Mahlon had the same kind smile.

BOAZ: Who is she? What does this mean?

RUTH: Why here? Why now?

BOAZ: Take a chance.

RUTH: Take a risk.

BOAZ: *(To her.)* I'm Boaz.

RUTH: *(To him.)* I'm Ruth.

*(They look at each other, solemnly, seeing each other clearly for the first time. Slow blackout.)*

## RACHEL'S SISTER

*(A tent. JACOB is pulling on his sandals, ad lib muttering to himself.)*

LEAH: Okay, look. Where are you going? What's the matter?

JACOB: I need to talk to your father.

LEAH: Why do you need to talk to my father?

JACOB: Oh, like you don't know.

LEAH: I don't!

JACOB: Fine, you don't have any idea. I still have to talk to him.

LEAH: He's gone.

JACOB: Gone?

LEAH: He'll be back tomorrow, or the next day. How urgent can it be?

JACOB: Great. *(Sits grumpily.)*

LEAH: What's the big hurry?

JACOB: Oh, wow. You know, you're good, you really are, you sound so innocent, like you had nothing to do with—.

LEAH: What are you talking about?

JACOB: That wasn't you under that veil?

LEAH: Yeah, and here in your bed last night. We got married, remember?

JACOB: And how, exactly, was it you and I getting married?

LEAH: Seriously?

JACOB: I was marrying Rachel! I thought, last night, it was Rachel and I who—.



fourth wife, but she'd be out of my hair.

RUTH: If I could only guess what he's thinking.

BOAZ: And yet, remember yesterday. The loyalty she showed her mother-in-law. She converted to our ways, out of love, and also out of devotion. I mustn't forget that.

RUTH: We spoke, and he was so generous, far beyond what was required of him.

BOAZ: She's not like anyone I've ever met.

I know what she's thinking. She thinks I'm going to make her a proposition—an indecent one.

LEAH: I'm four inches taller than Rachel; I've got to have twenty pounds on her! You really thought I was her?!

JACOB: I worked seven years to marry her. Everyone knew that. I don't even understand how—.

LEAH: Well, gosh, I'm sorry. You married me instead. Get over it.

JACOB: Everyone knew who I was marrying!

LEAH: You signed the ketuvah!

JACOB: I signed a . . . no, no, no, to marry Rachel! Your sister! Not. . . . (*New horrible thought.*) Oh, man. So last night, it may not even have been—.

LEAH: Last night was . . . what it was, a wedding night. We're married, legally, lawfully. If I'm getting this right, you apparently didn't even bother to look at the marriage contract, which I sort of think would be the normal thing to do, to actually read over something before you sign your name to it, no, not you, couldn't be bothered, but if, if you had, you'd have seen my name. Which I thought you knew. Right there on top, big letters.

JACOB: (*Wincing.*) Leah, listen. Could you maybe keep it down a little?

LEAH: What? Why?

JACOB: My head's just sort of splitting in half, and—.

LEAH: Hungover. Great, that explains a lot.

JACOB: Look. It's tradition, people come up to you: "I'chaim," "I'chaim," someone hands you a drink. They toast you, you toast 'em back.

LEAH: So last night, then. Seriously. You had no idea?

JACOB: Sorry. I don't remember . . . much.

LEAH: Well, I wondered. Dad and I, we were sort of expecting a stronger reaction. But then you just signed your name, right there on the dotted line, so I figured, hey, he's okay with it. He's cooler than I thought.

JACOB: Sorry. (*New thought.*) Though, I'm not sure I'm the person who should be apologizing here.

LEAH: It was my father's idea. He was all ready to explain what the thinking was, but then you didn't even—.

JACOB: Ah, an explanation, yes, that would be great! I'd love to hear his explanation!

LEAH: He loves me.

JACOB: He's your father; of course he loves his—.

LEAH: He loves me. It's not totally impossible, you know.

JACOB: It's also not relevant. When I think about the way you two—.

LEAH: You want an explanation; every time I start, there you go, kvetching and moaning—.

JACOB: So explain.

LEAH: You ever give one thought to me, to my situation? My younger sister getting married first? My prospects not exactly brilliant, and then this public humiliation? Me, maid of honor to my younger sister.

JACOB: Okay, I admit—.

LEAH: Seven years you've waited for Rachel, and never once did you go, oh, wait, she's got an older unmarried sister. Boy, this could really be hard for her.

JACOB: We talked about it. Rachel and I.





LEAH: I bet you did.

JACOB: We did. Several times.

LEAH: And how did those conversations go? “Oh, gosh, poor Leah. Oh, well, that’s how things go, sometimes.”

JACOB: Look, you’re making us sound completely heartless. We were worried about you; we talked about it all the time. But you seemed content enough.

LEAH: Content. I didn’t have a fit. I didn’t weep and moan and throw myself a pity party. I promise you I wasn’t content.

JACOB: We did what we could. We talked to some people. Guys.

LEAH: Trying to find someone who would take even me?

JACOB: I have friends.

LEAH: Friends, you’re a stranger, working as a servant, who do you know?

JACOB: I’m your cousin.

LEAH: Which makes the whole thing even weirder. And it’s not like you have a brother or something.

JACOB: Well. . . .

LEAH: What?

JACOB: I do, actually, have a brother.

LEAH: You do.

JACOB: An older brother, yeah.

LEAH: Well, that would have been nice to know. Seven years you live here, and that’s the first any of us heard about any brother.

JACOB: You don’t want Esau, I promise. Last I saw him, he was trying to kill me.

LEAH: Can’t say I blame the man.

JACOB: It’s complicated.

LEAH: So, as your wife, I’d still like to know—

JACOB: Seriously, Leah, you don’t want Esau. It’s not a good situation. He thinks I tricked him, for one thing. Cheated him.

LEAH: You stole from him?

JACOB: Not really, more like a birthright sort of—

LEAH: You stole his birthright?!

JACOB: No! Well, maybe. Sort of.

LEAH: Sort of?

JACOB: Okay. I did. But my Mom put me up to it, and it was for a good reason.

LEAH: Fine, who cares. Point is, I would have liked to have known about a brother. Even if you were a jerk to him. And your Mom, seriously, your Mom? What in the world did your Mom—?

JACOB: You said you didn’t want to hear about it.

LEAH: No, you’re right. You said “‘complicated,’ so okay. It still can’t be as complicated as this.

JACOB: No.

LEAH: *(Pause, as they consider it.)* Anyway this wasn’t some plot to steal my sister’s boyfriend. *(He reacts.)* I mean it. I knew you were in love with Rachel. I was happy for you, both of you. I was.

JACOB: And you were my friend. Our friend.

LEAH: I tried to be. Remember that first dinner?

JACOB: Yeah.

LEAH: You didn't even see me. I don't think you took your eyes off Rachel for two seconds. I don't even know how you fed yourself, the way you were staring at her. Thought you were going to take a bite out of the salt cellar or the wine flask, or—.

JACOB: (*A faraway look.*) She was so beautiful. There was a connection between us, right from the start.

LEAH: Not for her. You think that was something new for her, to have some guy go all googly eyes over her? I'll give you this, though, you did move fast, kissing her eight seconds after saying hello the first time you met her. That made an impression.

JACOB: She kissed me back, too.

LEAH: She kisses everybody back! She's Rachel!

JACOB: But she came to love me. I know that. It was mutual.

LEAH: Yes. She's in love. With you. She's with Dad right now, crying her eyes out.

JACOB: Oh my gosh. I've got to see her.

LEAH: Excuse me?

JACOB: I'm saying, I need to see Rachel—.

LEAH: And I'm saying that maybe your wife might have some objections to you wanting to see another woman the day after the wedding!

JACOB: Your sister!

LEAH: But you want her!

JACOB: We're engaged!

LEAH: (*Gesturing, 'you and I.'*) Well, we're married!

JACOB: Which was not my idea!

LEAH: Well, it wasn't my idea either!

JACOB: (*Holds his head.*) Oh, man. Shouldn't shout like that, I can't have this conversation right now. (*Pause.*)

LEAH: Well, we have to have it sometime.

JACOB: So, where's your father?

LEAH: Gone, for now. He'll explain everything when you talk to him.

JACOB: Great, tomorrow, first thing.

LEAH: Or the next day—.

JACOB: The next day!

LEAH: Okay, next month. We're newlyweds; he wanted to give us some privacy, okay!

JACOB: I've got to wait a month to sort this out?

LEAH: Sort it out?

JACOB: Yeah. Fix the mistake.

LEAH: Fix the mistake.

JACOB: Well, yeah. (*Pause.*)

LEAH: You're upset, fine. But there's no mistake. We're married.

JACOB: We're not supposed to be.

LEAH: But we are. Legally, lawfully. And there was last night.

JACOB: Another mistake.

LEAH: (*Bitterly.*) Oh, thank you very much.

JACOB: It was. It doesn't matter what happened. It matters what I thought was happening.

LEAH: To you, that's what matters. Either way, though, I'm not a virgin any more.

JACOB: What can I say? I didn't know it was you.

LEAH: There are times you can really be a bastard, you know that? (*Pause. She calms herself.*) You want to sort this out. Fix the mistake. What exactly do you plan on doing?

JACOB: Like I know! I've known about this for ten minutes!

LEAH: Think it through. We're married. I'm your wife; you're my husband. You can set me aside. That is possible for you; you're a stranger; you could just go home to Canaan and risk your brother, whatever that's about. Forget you ever saw me. That's possible.

JACOB: But where would that leave you?

LEAH: Bad. Social-outcast-for-the-rest-of-my-life bad. Figure-of-pity, poor-Leah-what-a-shame sort of bad. No-possibility-of-any-decent-man, ever, ever, even-with-a-rich-daddy, ever, wanting-me-for-his-wife bad. That's how bad.

JACOB: Okay, but what are my alternatives? You deceived me.

LEAH: I did not!

JACOB: You did. You made the choice to deceive me.

LEAH: How, what? Deceived? My name right there on the ketubah?

JACOB: I'm sorry. (*Shaking his head, heading for the door.*) But I can't, I just can't—.

I can settle for a marriage  
 one step above slavery, or  
 Or, there's you.



LEAH: Leave me, and you'll never see Rachel again. (*This stops him.*)

JACOB: No.

LEAH: After you treat me so contemptibly, do you really think my father—.

JACOB: No, he wouldn't. Of course he wouldn't.

LEAH: So you have it in your power, right now, to destroy three lives. Or . . .

JACOB: Or not.

LEAH: Exactly. (*A pause, as he thinks this over.*)

JACOB: How can you even want me? Knowing how I feel about Rachel.

LEAH: Well, it's not exactly what I would have chosen either. But there's a way you could have us both.

JACOB: I thought about that. We could just be married.

LEAH: That's right. And then you go to see my father again, when he's back, and at that point, he will agree to your marriage to Rachel. He'll ask for seven more year's service—.

JACOB: What?!@&%\$@#%!

LEAH: And then he will agree to it.

JACOB: I've already given him seven years!

LEAH: Oh, so that's your concern!? Not the impossible logistics and questionable morality and dubious practicality of polygamy, no, not you, no, you're thinking "Seven more years, seven more years! I have to be a servant for seven more years!"

JACOB: Your father and I had a deal!

LEAH: And he's going to live up to it! His way!

JACOB: I've already worked for him for—

LEAH: For seven years, I know! That got you me!

JACOB: I can't believe this. *(Pause.)* Okay, look, I understand that I'm from another country. And you guys have customs that maybe I don't understand completely. And, okay, my grandfather Abraham had two wives, so I understand it's not totally impossible.

LEAH: All right.

JACOB: But seven years? What? Why?

LEAH: I told you. My father loves me.

JACOB: Oh. You said that before, and I didn't understand it.

But yeah, he loves you. Of course he does.

LEAH: Look, you told us about your grandfather, about

ge that's maybe a tiny baby  
I can stay single all my life.

Abraham. We'd heard stories too, amazing stories, but you know, that whole thing about marriage? Wow. Marriage, as something sort of holy, something, like, eternal. A partnership of righteous equals. That's unbelievable. That's so amazing.

JACOB: Like I want with Rachel.

LEAH: Seriously, cut it out. Okay? I'm your wife, get used to it.

JACOB: Fine.

LEAH: Look. You told us those stories, both of us. I know you were mostly talking to Rachel, but the rest of the family was in the room. And, I mean, marriage, what's marriage? You said it yourself, a contract. A business deal.

JACOB: I don't want that.

LEAH: But that's what it is. Everywhere. Women, we're like sheep or goats or cattle, something our fathers barter. And so we're taught, hey, that's how it is, make the best of it. Bear his children, and don't complain.

JACOB: But my grandfather and my father, both, they had a better vision.

LEAH: Yes!

JACOB: Two partners, standing together, worshipping Yahweh as independent equals.

LEAH: And then it lasts! It doesn't just end when we die; we don't face judgment alone! I heard what you said, night after night, and it burned. It burned in my soul! That's what I want. That's what my father wants for me. For both his daughters. And there isn't anybody else; it's got to be with you. No else gets it.

JACOB: I've tried to tell other people, but you're right. Their minds are closed. Especially . . . guys.

LEAH: So that's why the seven years.

JACOB: So we can have time, just the two of us.

LEAH: So that I have a chance! You love Rachel, I know that. But I'm . . . I'm a person, too. Just because she's cuter and smaller and . . . pretty. And I know I'm not. It's okay. It's actually not okay; it stinks, but . . . I deserve a chance. To stand before Yahweh with someone who thinks of me as . . . a co-equal, a mate. I deserve that.

JACOB: You could have all that. With someone else. It's your father's job to make a good match for you.

LEAH: No. It had to be you.

JACOB: Good men are rare, that's true. But your father's a wealthy man. He could search far and wide.

LEAH: Looking for what?

JACOB: A decent man, a good husband. *(Stops to consider.)* Who worships Yahweh.

LEAH: That's it. That's the problem. You told us about Abraham's promise. "As numerous as grains of sand on a beach." I believe that; I think it's possible, the ideas your grandfather taught will spread. But we're at the beginning of that chain. No one else gets it.

JACOB: No one.

LEAH: No. So here you are. I can settle for a marriage that's maybe a tiny baby step above slavery, or I can stay single all my life. Or, there's you. The one truly eligible bachelor in the world. Promised to my sister and deeply in love with her.

JACOB: So your Dad tricked me.

LEAH: Runs in the family.

JACOB: Fair enough.

LEAH: My father bought us some time. Bought me some time. A chance to be together, to form a relationship. And bought you some time to actually see me, as me, as a person. And maybe even . . .

JACOB: Fall in love.

LEAH: Something like that.

JACOB: But after seven years, Rachel will also be my wife.

LEAH: And I'll have to share my marriage with Rachel. And I'm willing to do that. I really am. All I want is a chance. *(Pause.)* So what do you say?

JACOB: I . . . don't mean to hurt you. But I'm still in love with Rachel.

LEAH: And you're not in love with me.

JACOB: No. And that's what makes the whole thing possible, the whole partnership Yahweh wants us to have. And I'm not unwilling to, you know, give this a try. I do see you as

a person, Leah. I do admire you, and I see your good qualities. But there's another big factor. I'm in love with someone else.

LEAH: So what is it? Love. Something you fall into? Like falling off a cliff or falling in a lake?

JACOB: Love is the key.

LEAH: Doesn't make sense. Some force you can't control? It's like saying, hey, never mind all that talk about sin, the key to salvation is who trips the fewest times. Sorry, you're sort of clumsy. To Gehenna with you!

JACOB: But that is what happens. The first moment I saw Rachel, I knew. Love at first sight.

LEAH: Predestined, huh? Ordained by God?

JACOB: But . . . that's how it feels.

LEAH: So. I know that feeling. I've been in love. With someone else, not you.

JACOB: Your father refused him?

LEAH: I refused him. He worshipped Dagon. The fish god? You don't even want to know their worship rites. Plus there was the human sacrifice angle, plus plus plus.

JACOB: Oh.

LEAH: Not a bad man. Not a good vision.

JACOB: But you loved him.

LEAH: I thought so.

JACOB: All I know is how I feel. That first moment, I saw her, I barely even knew what I was doing. I walked up to her, and I took her face in my hands, and I kissed her. I hadn't even told her my name. Like I was holding the rarest, most precious, most delicate gift in the world in my arms.

LEAH: A gift from Yahweh.

JACOB: Yes!

LEAH: So He's given us another gift, you and me. One that might be even more precious.

JACOB: More precious than love?

LEAH: Time. And a chance.

JACOB: And what of our children?

LEAH: What about them?

JACOB: Will I favor Rachel over you? How can I not? Will I favor her children over yours?

LEAH: Our children!

JACOB: But I'll know. There's my son by Rachel; there's my son by Leah. I don't think I can do this.

LEAH: We have seven years to make it work for us.

JACOB: I don't know . . . if I can.

LEAH: Can't we at least try?

JACOB: I don't know. I've already served seven years, you know. And they seemed like no time at all, because of Rachel, because of my love for her. Now, seven more years?

LEAH: Try. Or leave. Those are your choices.

JACOB: This isn't fair to you.

LEAH: No, it isn't. And I know that the day you marry her, too, will hurt worse than anything I've ever experienced. At least I'm prepared.

JACOB: I'm sorry about that too.

LEAH: But I'm willing. Pain and all, I'll risk it.

JACOB: Let's be married, then. (*With a great breath, LEAH sighs in relief.*)

LEAH: All right.  
(*She embraces him. He holds her. But on his face, we read his fear. Blackout.*)

## OUTSIDE JERICHO

(*JOSHUA's tent outside JERICHO. RAHAB stands, trembling, before him.*)

JOSHUA: Rahab.

RAHAB: Rahab.

JOSHUA: The prostitute.

RAHAB: The woman who helped your men. In exchange for . . . look, I need to get back. Why am I here? What's this about?

JOSHUA: I haven't decided what to do with you.

RAHAB: We have a deal. I hid your men. I risked my life and the lives of my children—.

JOSHUA: I know.

RAHAB: Promises were made to me. I was given an assurance—.

JOSHUA: I have questions about that assurance.

RAHAB: Your men and I came to an agreement—.

JOSHUA: I question that agreement.

RAHAB: I see. Questions. What questions?

JOSHUA: Why?

RAHAB: Why what? What's the problem? We had an agreement!

JOSHUA: I'm just trying to make sense of it. You're a woman of Jericho. You have friends, neighbors, family—.

RAHAB: You have an army of six hundred thousand men! We're just a little city. Why shouldn't I save myself and my children?

JOSHUA: How do you know of my army?

RAHAB: Joshua's famous army! Everyone knows about it! We trade with Egypt. We knew about your escape, the great plagues, Pharaoh's army drowned in the waters of the reed sea.

JOSHUA: So Egyptians told you—?

RAHAB: We knew the old tales as well, how the Hebiru went south from Canaan. We expected you to show up sooner or later to attack us. Desert to the east, kingdoms of the Nubia west and south, Assyria and Babylon north and east. We've waited for forty years. At first we were frightened—so huge an army. Then, when no one appeared . . . You've been where? I'll wager: the Sinai, wilderness and mountain.

JOSHUA: Lost. We were lost.

RAHAB: Lost, yes. But you had to know where you were. Perhaps . . . you didn't know *who*?

JOSHUA: (*Surprised by this insight of hers.*) Yes.

RAHAB: Then your men arrived. It wasn't hard to work out. The exiled Hebiru, long gone from Canaan. Hebrew

spies. I'd never seen anyone like that before, though, that strange mutilation.

JOSHUA: You refer to the mark . . . .

RAHAB: I am Rahab, the harlot.

JOSHUA: My men knew you? Carnally?

RAHAB: It's what I do.

JOSHUA: They say no.

RAHAB: Men lie with women and then lie to their friends about it.

JOSHUA: My men would not . . . . *(He pauses.)*

RAHAB: Do things like that. Worship a golden calf, say?

JOSHUA: You know that story too?

RAHAB: They told me a great deal. And they worshipped a God without name, a God whose initials spell out something they won't pronounce. They had to be Hebiru.

JOSHUA: Who do you worship? If I may ask.

RAHAB: I'm not devout.

JOSHUA: Ashteroth, perhaps? Consort to Baal? Outside the door to your home, my men saw a kind of stand, more like a high seat. It had the figure of a naked goddess, guarded by lions. Ashteroth.

RAHAB: Astarte. We call her Astarte.

JOSHUA: So you worship the goddess.

RAHAB: It's a pretty statue.

JOSHUA: More evasions.

RAHAB: I like pretty things. Perhaps I could be said to worship it.

JOSHUA: Astarte.

RAHAB: Beauty.

JOSHUA: Here's my dilemma. It's possible that you are simply a harlot, a prostitute selling herself for money. If so, your very existence violates the Seventh of our Commandments, the most sacred laws of our God. The statutory my men saw likewise violates the Second Commandment. Preserving your life, promise or no promise, winks at sin.

RAHAB: I'm not a common—.

JOSHUA: On the other hand, you might be something even more sinister. A temple priestess, a religious harlot. A worshipper of the fertility goddess Ashteroth, and therefore one who lies with men who wish a boon from the goddess, swift planting, a good harvest. In which case, your very existence violates the First Commandment, the Second, the Third . . . .

RAHAB: I hid your men!

JOSHUA: Apparently, you did more than just hide them. A sin for which their lives may well be forfeit.

RAHAB: You'll kill them?

JOSHUA: I would.

RAHAB: And me, despite their promises?

JOSHUA: That is the subject of this present conversation.

RAHAB: So your God allows you to lie, to murder?

JOSHUA: No—.

RAHAB: Break promises, promise falsely.

JOSHUA: When death is decreed by God, it's not counted as murder. When God commands deception, it doesn't count as a lie.

RAHAB: A convenient moral code, that.

JOSHUA: Hardly convenient. When God commands, we obey. His commandments are seldom . . . convenient.

RAHAB: Oh, please. Just tell me straight. I betrayed my people for no good purpose?

JOSHUA: I have not decided.

RAHAB: Can I argue my case? Or do I just wait for your God to give you a vision.

JOSHUA: It would be best, I think, if you told the truth.

RAHAB: Yes, I'm a priestess of Astarte! I was forced into her service as a child, forced to lie with men seeking blessing, impregnated, and forced to watch my children ripped from my arms fresh from the womb, and fed to Baal for sacrifice! I watched three sons roll down the brass slide to the fire in the belly of the God, I heard them scream. I smelled their flesh burn! I have two daughters who live, two more raised to be priestesses, a worse fate even than their brothers suffered!

JOSHUA: So you do not believe in Ashteroth?

RAHAB: Believe in?

JOSHUA: Worship.

RAHAB: I do what is required of me, or I will die. If that's what you mean by worship, then yes, I worship Astarte.

JOSHUA: All right.

RAHAB: Is that even the right answer?

JOSHUA: Your children died? Your sons died in the flames. That must have been terrible.

RAHAB: It was. Yes.

JOSHUA: So that helps explain . . . .

RAHAB: My treason.

JOSHUA: I'm sorry. It aids us, so I shouldn't be ungrateful.

RAHAB: At least you admit I helped you.

JOSHUA: These plans are helpful.

RAHAB: I got them for you. It wasn't easy.

JOSHUA: Yes.

RAHAB: So. You attack tomorrow?

JOSHUA: We attack when God commands it.

RAHAB: Six hundred thousand men sweeping across the plain of Jericho. A sight worth seeing.

JOSHUA: And you look forward to the destruction of your people?

RAHAB: My people. Whom I have more reason to hate than you could possibly understand. Destroy Jericho. It needs to be ruined!

JOSHUA: We plan to; we'll wipe it clean.

RAHAB: But not everyone! Not me, not mine! We were promised safe haven!

JOSHUA: And that, I have not forgotten. *(Pause, as he considers her.)*

RAHAB: Who are you?

JOSHUA: People who worship the one true God.

RAHAB: Who is He. What does He look like?

JOSHUA: His name, we hold sacred. What does He look like? We don't know. He's everywhere, in our hearts.

RAHAB: That's what your men said! The same answers, the same mystery!

JOSHUA: It's mysterious to us as well.

RAHAB: I'll tell you. I don't think you have so great an army.  
 JOSHUA: Our army is indeed very great, six hundred thousand strong.  
 RAHAB: Or six thousand? Or six hundred?  
 JOSHUA: The men in this camp are only the vanguard. Across the river—  
 RAHAB: Wilderness. We've seen nothing, heard nothing, no fires at night, no noise and commotion.  
 JOSHUA: We are very well disciplined.  
 RAHAB: I don't think so. I think your army is small, much smaller than the stories suggest. The Egyptians are great braggarts. They would not have it said they were defeated by a handful of escaping slaves.  
 JOSHUA: For a Canaanite, you know Egypt.  
 RAHAB: They come to town to trade, and they love the temple priestesses. (*Pause.*) This is your entire army, isn't it? This camp, these few tents.  
 JOSHUA: I told you, across the river—  
 RAHAB: Is nothing. No army, no chariots or horses. Your power comes from your God.  
 JOSHUA: Yes.  
 RAHAB: More mystery! Gods are just statuary, fat and ugly; we murder our children to feed them and sometimes good harvests result. But you, you really do rely on this nameless God.  
 JOSHUA: Yes.  
 RAHAB: One of your men told me something; I thought he was joking, but he wasn't, was he? Your plan is to march around the city, playing trumpets, until the walls fall down.  
 JOSHUA: Until God knocks them down. (*Starts to go.*)  
 RAHAB: And now you're going to kill me. I can see it in your face—you've decided.  
 JOSHUA: Not . . . entirely.  
 RAHAB: I have two daughters. I want them to live. I want to live myself. And you're going to kill me right now, and I can't prevent you, and your battle plan's nonsense, and if it fails, I'm just as dead, a traitor to my people. My only hope is in your God, nameless, statue-less.  
 JOSHUA: The only hope any of us have. (*Again starts to leave.*)  
 RAHAB: There's a truth here that must be said, and while it terrifies me to say it, I'm more scared not to.  
 JOSHUA: (*Impressed, again.*) That's how it feels, sometimes.  
 RAHAB: When your God speaks?  
 JOSHUA: It's how I've felt Him.  
 RAHAB: Your God works for you in ways no other god does.  
 JOSHUA: Yes.  
 RAHAB: And this. This isn't an ordinary war, is it? You didn't come here to conquer Canaan. You came to cleanse it.  
 JOSHUA: Yes.  
 RAHAB: Your God hates our gods. Hates our sacrifices, hates the rituals of temple priestesses.  
 JOSHUA: Yes.  
 RAHAB: To show your hatred of human sacrifice, you're

going to kill everyone who believes in it? Kill, to prevent human sacrifice?  
 JOSHUA: And you scoff; you consider it absurd. I can only say that God requires it.  
 RAHAB: You know that?  
 JOSHUA: I know it.  
 RAHAB: You absolutely know it? No doubt whatsoever.  
 JOSHUA: None.  
 RAHAB: And you can't spare anyone? Not a single soul?  
 JOSHUA: I don't know. God hasn't spoken to me quite as clearly as I would prefer. I don't doubt, not for an instant, but . . . answers don't always come when or how we would like.  
 RAHAB: You're certain, though, absolutely certain that you have to kill? Only when it comes to saving me and my daughters, there you have some tiny doubt.  
 JOSHUA: I chose to serve my God. It was a free choice, made in the wilderness, the first free act of my life. I can't allow myself doubt.  
 RAHAB: But you've got to.  
 JOSHUA: Counsel, from a temple harlot.  
 RAHAB: A messenger all the same. Here's what the voice in me says I must tell you: give room in your heart for doubt.  
 JOSHUA: No.  
 RAHAB: Hear me out.  
 JOSHUA: I can't. I won't. I don't.  
 RAHAB: You're a human being. You have to feel doubt.  
 JOSHUA: I don't. I serve my God!  
 RAHAB: And He hates my gods, and who can blame him? But let me tell you a story, a true one. My first time with a man was, I don't know, when I was a child, nine, maybe ten years old. He was a Mede, wanting a blessing from Astarte over some business transaction. The high priestess had been beating me all morning, preparing me, giving me a taste of what would happen if I didn't please the suppliant. He was in the inner temple. I was about to go in to him. I was desperately trying not to cry. And just before I went in, another priestess saw me, and quickly ran over to me, and gave me a hug. Just a little embrace. "It's awful," she whispered. "I know. But it'll soon be over." A tiny moment of kindness.  
 JOSHUA: She was forcing a child—  
 RAHAB: I know what she was doing! I don't defend her! I don't defend anything about Jericho!  
 JOSHUA: It needs to be destroyed.  
 RAHAB: And I agree! You're wiping out a way of worship that's horrible. No one knows better than I the cruelty of it. But that's not the entire story.  
 JOSHUA: It is the entire story.  
 RAHAB: No. Because part of that story is that hug. A little comfort for a terrified child, a moment of something, some humanity in the middle of—  
 JOSHUA: One hug!  
 RAHAB: A small thing. But it happened.  
 JOSHUA: And then what? A nine-year-old temple priestess.

# It seems to me there might be something harder than dying for what you believe ...



Carnal relations with every worshipper. Then you bore children, and they were sacrificed: brutal, inhuman—.

RAHAB: Yes!

JOSHUA: We need to cleanse this land, return to the worship of the one true God. And that priestess, if she's in the city tomorrow, she will die.

RAHAB: Necessary, yes! But isn't there a cost, a human cost? You have to consider it. It weakens your resolve, and it should. You've been commanded to do something terrible. It's going to change you. You need to be prepared. (*JOSHUA turns away from her. After a pause.*) You're going to attack my city tomorrow, and you're going to kill everyone. And we'll fight back, best we can, and some of your men may die. You may even die.

JOSHUA: I would happily die serving my God.

RAHAB: And that makes you a better person than I, I know, because you're willing to die for your people and I'm clearly not willing to die for mine. But it seems to me there might be something harder than dying for what you believe.

JOSHUA: Living for what I believe.

RAHAB: No. Killing for it. (*A long pause, as JOSHUA is struck by this thought.*) Your people were slaves. Your God gave you strength in captivity and eventually set you free.

JOSHUA: He did.

RAHAB: I'm a slave too. Most of us are slaves, really—between the temple and the military, hardly anyone in Jericho is free. So save us—save me and my children.

JOSHUA: Yes. All right, I can do that much.

RAHAB: And let me decide who my children are.

JOSHUA: You have two daughters.

RAHAB: There are children in Jericho, Joshua, hundreds of small children. There are women, decent to their neighbors and good mothers to their children. There are families, young men working a small garden plot. Do they worship Baal and Astarte? Do they keep a figurine by the hearth because it's expected of them and no harm done?

JOSHUA: I have to cleanse this land.

RAHAB: Then cleanse it! The fat priests who murder infants, the ferocious overlords who tax the poor, the old crone priestesses who terrify children. Yes, they're a scourge on the land. Your nameless God must be better than what we have.

JOSHUA: He is.

RAHAB: Let me join you. And my children. Just let me decide who my children are.

JOSHUA: It's not what I've been commanded to do.

RAHAB: Then make Him a deal.

JOSHUA: I can't make deals with God.

RAHAB: Seems to me you could start.

JOSHUA: I must give this some thought.

RAHAB: And prayer, of course.

JOSHUA: Yes.

RAHAB: So while you think and pray. Can I just say one more, tiny, thing?

JOSHUA: I don't know. You unsettle me.

RAHAB: Well I've been a little unsettled lately myself.

JOSHUA: Go ahead.

RAHAB: When you attack tomorrow, remember that hug.

JOSHUA: Why?

RAHAB: Your war can't be like any other war ever fought. It can't be glorious, like all the other wars. It should be a war fought sadly, regretfully. You're killing your brothers and sisters. If my people were attacking you, they wouldn't see it that way, but you have to, you know better. Maybe this war is necessary; maybe God does require it. It's still terrible.

JOSHUA: It's easier, though, to glory in it. To trample every nagging doubt. Easier not to question.

RAHAB: It's easier to kill me than to let me go.

JOSHUA: True. I thought I wanted it, war and death and violence. I thought I would find it glorious, though all to God's glory.

RAHAB: But it's not.

## ... Killing for it.

JOSHUA: No. He has a plan for us, and somehow that plan requires not just death and pain, but slaughter.

RAHAB: I don't understand that either. And I'm frightened for you. People are going to hear of this. Your story is going to be told. Maybe even read about in books, generation after generation. Doesn't that thought make you shudder? (*JOSHUA turns away, disturbed.*) It's just so easy, people justifying to themselves, "Oh, God's on our side. Oh, those horrible people are vile and vicious. Let's wipe them all out." I worry about it, evil done in your name.

JOSHUA: (A shocked pause, then an outburst.) Why do you do this to me? I never even considered that until now.

RAHAB: I knew men. What you're doing tomorrow is the worst thing in the world. If God requires it, then maybe you have to obey, but it's awful, and I think it's going to be done again and again, and I think people are going to excuse themselves by saying God requires it, even when He doesn't. I think you're opening a door to horror and viciousness, and I know you have to open it, I'm even helping you open it, but please, while you do God's will, find room in your heart for doubt.

JOSHUA: I can't!

RAHAB: This can't be your doing. It has to be God working through you.

JOSHUA: Of course!

RAHAB: Not of course! They will be sure as well, those other killers, the ones who will come after you. They'll be just as sure as you are. And as wrong as you are right. Especially if you spare me. And everyone I declare to be family.

JOSHUA: And now I'm filled with doubt, I'm nothing but doubt!

RAHAB: But is that so bad?

JOSHUA: I don't know.

RAHAB: You're writing a terrible book. Perhaps the worst book ever written. A book that makes murder seem glorious. And perhaps it needs to be written that way. Perhaps a time will come when you've been conquered and your scribes decide your people need a heroic myth to keep them from despair. But it's not really what your God can possibly want of you. That's not really who Yahweh is.

JOSHUA: You speak his name!

RAHAB: Well I know his name, certainly. I can read, and I've heard of your Avraham.

JOSHUA: Abraham.

RAHAB: And God required of him a terrible sacrifice, did he not? But then . . . not really.

JOSHUA: Yes.

RAHAB: So spare me. Spare my . . . family. And save yourself. From the worst excesses you think your God requires.

JOSHUA: Yes.

RAHAB: Yes?

JOSHUA: Yes. You are spared. And all those you declare family.

RAHAB: Thank you. (Gets up.) I've got to go back. I'll be missed, and my neighbors might become suspicious. And I want to say goodbye.

JOSHUA: You do?

RAHAB: Oh, yes. We're not all monsters, we people of Jericho. I'll say goodbye. I'll bring them some food. We'll talk as friends. I want to remember them kindly. And then tomorrow, I'll have to watch many of them die. I hate the thought, but I don't see any way around it.

JOSHUA: Goodbye, temple priestess.





RAHAB: Just call me a friend.

JOSHUA: I call you more than that. I call you blessed.

RAHAB: (*Laughs a little.*) Blessed. I like that. Blessed. Aren't we a pair? Genocide Joshua and the blessed traitor-whore.

JOSHUA: Doing what God commands us.

RAHAB: And trusting that maybe He knows what He's about.

(*She laughs.*) Trumpets. I'm trusting my life to trumpets!  
(*Shaking her head, she exits. He waits, pensively, for the dawn.*)

*Blackout.*)

## EVE, DYING

(*ADAM and EVE lie in bed next to each other. He's asleep; she lies awake, flat on her back, in terrible pain. She looks over at him. Finally, reluctantly, she speaks quietly.*)

EVE: Adam? Honey? (*ADAM stirs, awakens almost immediately.*) I'm so sorry, honey. The herb we use, for pain. I could really use it right now.

ADAM: Of course. (*Gets up, begins making a kind of tea.*)

EVE: I'm really sorry. I know you didn't get much sleep last night.

ADAM: You've been lying there, haven't you? Not wanting to disturb me.

EVE: Not for long.

ADAM: I told you to wake me if you needed anything.

EVE: And so I have.

ADAM: Good. (*Busies himself with tea things.*)

EVE: It's not really so bad this morning. Mostly, I just wanted to talk.

ADAM: That's fine.

EVE: I was just lying here, and I thought, I bet today is the day.

ADAM: (*Starts at this, decides to ignore her. Brings her tea.*) Here's your tea.

EVE: Thanks. (*Takes a sip, makes a face.*) So bitter.

ADAM: We have honey. I could sweeten it . . .

EVE: No, it's good. It's best when it's strong like this, really sharp. It seems to help more.

ADAM: Still, a drop of honey—

EVE: It's all right. (*Takes another sip.*) It's good that it's bitter. I tell myself that, anyway. I'll have some berries later, and they'll taste all the sweeter.

ADAM: That's the spirit.

EVE: Some berries. And perhaps some bread. If today is the day . . .

ADAM: (*Sharply.*) Don't say that.

EVE: So you did hear me. I thought perhaps you didn't the first time I said it.

ADAM: We can't think that way. You're going to get over this. You're going to be fine.

EVE: Adam . . .

ADAM: Let's not talk nonsense. Seth's coming by tomorrow; you'll want to see him.

EVE: I'd like to see Seth, yes.

ADAM: We'll give you a blessing. And before you know it—

EVE: I don't want you to give me a blessing.

ADAM: Fasting, and prayer, and faith—

EVE: Can lead to miracles. That's entirely true. But not this time.

ADAM: You don't know that.

EVE: I do. I'm so sorry. I know this is hard for you.

ADAM: Hard for me! You're the one suffering! No, this isn't about me. This is . . .

EVE: Please, let's not quarrel. Not today.

ADAM: Of course not.

EVE: Adam, really. I've accepted it. I'm sort of looking forward to it.

ADAM: To leaving me?

EVE: Ending this, the pain, the helplessness. It's going to happen, and sooner rather than later. And I want to go home. I want this to end.

ADAM: Sometimes you're better.

EVE: Not lately. I'm not. (*Pause.*) I would like to say my goodbyes, to Seth, to the grandchildren. But I don't think I'm going to have time, honestly. So that's a bit of a shame.

ADAM: I know you. You're a good deal stronger than you think.

EVE: You know, that's one of the things I've always loved about you. Your optimism.

ADAM: I'm glad I had some good qualities.

EVE: A few. (*A pause.*) You were restless last night. A dream?

ADAM: Not so bad.

EVE: I'd rather you just told me about it. You do this. You want to gloss over your own fears.

ADAM: All right. Yes, a bad one.

EVE: The grandchildren again?

ADAM: No, actually, not like that at all. Not about anyone we know, or anything we've experienced. It was strange, different. Just people, talking.

EVE: Really?

ADAM: They were dressed so strangely, their language harsh to my ears.

EVE: A prophecy perhaps?

ADAM: Possibly. It had that kind of clarity.

EVE: So tell me.

ADAM: It's something I've feared. They were just talking, that's all. Different times and places. But they were talking about . . . (*Hesitates.*)

EVE: They were talking about me, weren't they?

ADAM: You've had the same dream.

EVE: The same fear, perhaps.

ADAM: They were all suffering. All over the world, they were in pain, terrible pain. They'd hold their stomachs, or their heads. They'd moan and toss. From illness, accident. And worse than that, people in far worse kinds of pain. From the deaths of children, the suffering of loved ones.

EVE: How terrible.

ADAM: And . . . they cursed.

EVE: They cursed God, do you mean?

ADAM: No. I might understand that, when some unknown calamity strikes . . . how someone might shout curses at the unknown, the unknowable.

EVE: But these people, they cursed something . . . else.

ADAM: Eve. They cursed you. They shouted it, the curse of Eve.

EVE: "We could be happy. We could be in paradise. But the woman listened. The snake seduced her. And she ate."

ADAM: Those exact words.

EVE: Yes.

ADAM: You've seen the same vision.

EVE: I think so. It sounds like it. It was shown me.

ADAM: Shown you?

EVE: By the serpent.

ADAM: You never told me that!

EVE: No.

ADAM: So he gloated. Showed you what you'd done, rubbed your nose in it.

EVE: Oh, no. No, he showed it to me before I ate.

ADAM: So it's a false vision, another lie.

EVE: I doubt it. Why would he?

ADAM: He was the father of lies!

EVE: Not then, I don't think. At that moment. Call him, rather, the father of insufficient information.

ADAM: I don't understand. Why would he show you that?

EVE: I think . . . he was being fair.

ADAM: Fair!

EVE: He'd rather tell us the truth, you know. He'd rather we worshipped him for himself.

ADAM: He's a liar and a bully and a tyrant!

EVE: Yes, he is. But he did show me what my choice would really mean. And really, what did I know about fear and agony? What did I know about pain? I saw people, that's all, people different from me, people wearing strange garments and speaking strange tongues. They seemed to have heard of me, and apparently I was important. Perhaps that's all that registered.

ADAM: But we'd heard of suffering. We'd heard of death.

EVE: We'd heard of them, yes. Ah, Adam. Do you remember the garden?

ADAM: Barely, anymore.

EVE: Well, I do remember that fruit. The one we were supposed to avoid. It had a sharp taste to it, sour; I don't know that it was fully ripe, to be honest. And the taste of it . . . do you remember?

ADAM: I took one bite and then spat it out, horrified at what I'd done.

EVE: I think you were more embarrassed. The way you were dressed. Or rather . . .

ADAM: (*A small chuckle.*) I remember.

EVE: We'd been living in the garden, who knows how long. And we'd eaten our bellies full, day after day. But nothing tasted . . . do you remember? It wasn't that food was

bland, really. It wasn't anything, sweet or salty or . . . anything.

ADAM: I remember.

EVE: I stood there, savoring the taste of that fruit. And I felt something, a light breeze on my shoulder. Sunshine on my back. Those two sensations, a cool breeze, and the warmth of the sun. And I knew I was . . . different. Me, but not the same me. Do you remember?

ADAM: I was looking for some kind of large leaf to cover myself, and I stepped on a root. And it hurt. And that stopped me. "What's that feeling?" I remember thinking. "I don't like it." But mostly I was just mortified.

EVE: What did we do in there? We named the animals.

ADAM: It was something to do.

EVE: Busywork for small children. I've done that with my own, set them on a meaningless task to keep them occupied.

ADAM: Yes.

EVE: And right then, that moment, I saw an animal, and I remembered naming it. An alpaca. But it wasn't enough anymore to just know what it was called. I wanted the wool from it. I wondered how it would taste.

ADAM: We were content enough in the garden.

EVE: We didn't know not to be.

ADAM: No.

EVE: But you. Back then, we were partners. We named things together. But if you left, if you went to another part of the garden, say, it didn't matter. You were just there, like the trees and animals were there.

ADAM: Yes.

EVE: But now, Adam, I ache for you.

ADAM: I know.

EVE: I ache. Longing, and pain, and hunger and fulfillment and joy.

ADAM: I ache, too. And now . . .

EVE: Go on. Say it.

ADAM: I can't.

EVE: You can. I'm dying, Adam. I'm very close to death.

ADAM: I . . .

EVE: I know.

ADAM: I can't bear it. I can't stand the thought of it.

EVE: I know.

ADAM: And sometimes I feel . . .

EVE: Go ahead. Say it all.

ADAM: I didn't choose this. To come here, and feel like this, this emptiness and loss and . . .

EVE: I know.

ADAM: You didn't want it. I didn't ask for it. You chose it for me. You chose!

EVE: I chose for both of us.

ADAM: You chose! And now you're going. You're leaving me, and . . .

EVE: Say it all, darling. We haven't much time, and it's best to say everything.

ADAM: Eve, I . . .

EVE: Say it.

ADAM: Well. (*Gains some control over his emotions.*) There are times I do resent that you chose.

EVE: You have every reason to.

ADAM: And now you tell me you saw the vision! The same one I saw, but before you ate that fruit.

EVE: I did, yes.

ADAM: Men cursing your name, men and women in agony and desperation cursing your choice.

EVE: I saw it all. (*He hesitates.*) Keep going. It's for the best.

ADAM: I felt that way. I felt exactly the same.

EVE: When our son killed our son.

ADAM: Yes. Then. (*A pause, as both remember.*)

EVE: I had not thought such pain could exist. One of our children, utterly destroyed. The other gone and buried. I felt it, too. I cursed the name of Eve that day.

ADAM: And so did I.

EVE: Physical pain, I've known that, the pushing, stretching agony of childbirth. But I hadn't realized how much worse pain could become.

ADAM: And I'll feel it again tomorrow. Won't I? When you're gone.

EVE: Less than before, darling. We know more now.

ADAM: Knowing more doesn't help!

EVE: Doesn't it?

ADAM: All right! Yes, I take comfort in what I believe. In what I know.

EVE: But you'll be so terribly alone. And so will I.

ADAM: So I have to ask this.

EVE: Go ahead.

ADAM: Was it worth it? You saw the vision, and you ate the fruit. But you didn't really understand, not really, not then. Would you do it again?

EVE: It was sour. I think it perhaps was a little unripe. Some of the juice ran down my chin, and I could feel it, sort of sticky. And I could hear a bee buzzing nearby, and feel a twig under my left foot, and a breeze, and sunshine. And I think tomorrow, I'll see Father again. And what I say to you now, I'll say to him then. Just two words. Thank you. Thank you!

ADAM: It's better. Isn't it? It's better than what we had.

EVE: And worse than either of us ever imagined.

ADAM: And worth every moment.

EVE: Yes. (*A paroxysm of pain overcomes her for a moment.*)

ADAM: Eve!

EVE: It's all right. (*Another pain.*) It won't be much longer, I think.

ADAM: My darling, my love.

EVE: If you could do one more thing for me, love. It would be easier, I think, if you were holding me. When . . .

ADAM: Of course.

(*He holds her. Slow blackout.*)

END