

**ABSALOM
THE KING**

By

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READERS' COMMENTS

“Your verse is wonderful and meaty...

The plot of this play is engaging and well thought out...manages to tell the complex family saga in a pace that is both satisfying and continuously exciting. From the opening ‘rape’ scene to Tamar’s final soliloquy, the audience is swept up in the tension of the play. The author clearly has the expertise to guide such a complex drama.

This play tackles the fascinating story of the Biblical Absalom, son of King David, in a smart, clear way with beautifully written dialogue that is consistent and doesn’t falter into contemporary language. The curtain rises right in the middle of the action, diving right into the story with a horrible rape and murder. This brings the audience right into the action immediately and is well done...love the way Joab instills the right thing to do in David, then allows him the space to make that decision feel like his own, advising but not undermining his king... the pairing of Absalom and Ahithophel against the mirror of David and Joab – the royal men and their advisors make a powerful linchpin to hold the whole story together... The play also follows the original story events nicely, showing the events that led up to Absalom’s death. The final scenes are entirely masterful – Tamar’s deep and abiding sorrow, David’s regrets and Joab’s sage advice.

Overall, this is an intelligent play that showcases attention to detail, beautifully written language and the exploration of a well-known story.”

WILDSound Writing Festival 2013

Dramatis Personae
In order of appearance

A'mon.....	Son of David, older brother of Absalom
Ta'-mar*.....	daughter of King David, sister of Absalom
Two servants.....	Servants of King David
King Da'-vid*.....	King of Judah and Israel
Young man.....	relative of the royal family
Guard.....	Of the palace
Prince.....	Son of David, half brother of Absalom
Servant.....	of Absalom
Ab'-sa-lom*.....	son of King David
Old woman+.....	subject of King David
Jo'-ab*.....	Senior Commander with King David
Joshua.....	Petitioner
Two petitioners.....	bringing grievances to the King
A-hith'-o-phel*.....	Advisor to King David
Young man in He'-bron.....	leader of a group of young men
Za'-dok.....	Tabernacle Priest
A-bi'-a-thar.....	Tabernacle Priest
Shim'-e-i.....	older citizen
A-bi'-shai.....	soldier with King David
Hu'-shai.....	Advisor to King David
Soldiers.....	army of Absalom
Soldier.....	loyal to King David
First Soldier.....	loyal to King David
Second Soldier.....	loyal to King David
A-him'-a-az.....	son of Zadok
Cu'-shi.....	messenger
Watchman.....	of Ma-ha-na'-im
Attendant+.....	servant of Tamar

*+ = principals

Scenes

ACT I	
Sc i	The Rape
Scii	Absalom and Tamar in the palace
ACT II	
Sc i	Hall - King David's Palace
Sc ii	The Royal chamber - King David's Palace
Sc iii	House of Absalom
Sc iv	Courtyard - King David's Plalace
Sc v	Absalom's rooms - King of Ge'-shur palace
Sc vi	Absalom's rooms – King of Ge'-shur palace
ACT III	
Sc i	House of Absalom
Sc ii	The Royal chamber – King David's Palace
Sc iii	The Royal chamber – King David's Palace
ACT IV	
Sc i	House of Absalom - twenty years later
Sc ii	Before the gates of Jerusalem
Sc iii	House of Absalom
Sc xii	Street in He'-bron
Sc xiii	The Royal chamber – King David's Palace
Sc xiv	The Tabernacle
ACT V	
Sc i	King David's army withdrawing
Sc ii	The Royal chamber – King David's Palace
Sc iii	The Royal chamber – King David's Palace
Sc iv	The tabernacle
Sc v	Absalom's Departure
Sc vi	Camp of King David's army
Sc vii	Outside the gate of the city of Ma-ha-na'-im
Sc viii	The Woods of E'-phra-im
Sc ix	The Woods of Ephraim
Sc x	Outside the gate of the city of Ma-ha-na'-im
Sc xi	Room in the palace in Jerusalem
Sc xii	Camp of King David's army
Sc xiii	House of King of Ge'-shur

These scenes need be no more than sketched, or simply identified in the program, or by a superscript above the stage, and left to the imagination of the audience.

Absalom the King

Act I Scene i

(Behind a scrim as in a dream, a young woman, Tamar, brings to her half brother, Amon, lying “ill” in his bed, some cakes to eat. But he suddenly grabs her arm and pulls her towards himself. He gestures for her to lie with him and she shakes her head “no”. He continues to pull her to his bed and there rapes her. Afterward she cries and he gestures for her to leave. She will not. He rises from his bed and summons his servants to eject her and bar the door to her. She is pushed through a door (outside the scrim) into a road and the door is bolted so that she cannot reenter. She reaches down and takes a handful of dirt and rubs it into her hair and smears it on her face. She then tears her fine garments and robes and sits upon the ground weeping. Only when she is outside the scrim is her weeping audible to the audience. There is *no* dialogue.)

Scene ii

(Tamar and Absalom are alone in a room of the palace)

TAMAR

What I have told you, that hath he done!

I am lost to self and to family.

TAMAR (CONT'D)

Should not such a deed be punished?

ABSALOM

The aim of his arrow was not true,

For t'was I he meant to harm, not you.

His insolence takes me for a coward,

In me the bitter seed he plants, hath flowered.

I shall bide my time with a smile,

But in my heart, plan my revenge the while!

My response will not fall wide the mark.

Then will be revealed what now is dark.

Act II Scene i

(Two years later two servants in a hall of the palace speak
in hushed tones.)

FIRST SERVANT

The king weeps in his chambers now.

SECOND SERVANT

Wherefore doth great King David weep?

FIRST SERVANT

Prince Absalom hath killed his brothers all.

SECOND SERVANT

What? Murdered them? All? In his house?

FIRST SERVANT

The prince invited them to his estate
To celebrate the shearing of the sheep
And the gathering of the unspindled wool.
When they were safe collected there,
And eating and imbibing the sweet wine,
Then did he, and his servants, slay them all.
So it was told by one who has escaped.

SECOND SERVANT

A fearful hospitality!
He must be altogether mad!
Why would he do such evil thing?

FIRST SERVANT

It doth make him the only heir.

SECOND SERVANT

The people won't accept such ways,
They fear that God will punish Israel!

FIRST SERVANT

But David loves fair Absalom
And the King is beloved by God.

SECOND SERVANT

Did David love his other sons?

SECOND SERVANT (CONT'D)

I think he did not love them less.

FIRST SERVANT

When Cain slew Abel he was sent

By God from Eden out to other lands.

SECOND SERVANT

Should David send away his son?

SECOND SERVANT

The young Prince Absalom?

Would it not surely break his heart!

Scene ii

(A state room in King David's Palace.)

(ENTER King David with family and friends comforting
him)

KING DAVID

My sons, all my dear sons, all gone!

Punish not the children, O Lord.

Why hast God done this thing to me?

Why hath He slain my family?

Why have they borne the punishment

That should have been just mine alone?

Those children, dear, that once

KING DAVID (CONT'D)

Rejoiced with me, ate at my table here,

Whose sweet fond voices I did love,

And wiped away their tears.

All that I did was done for them.

Here I shall be lost in old age,

Who will keep my name in remembrance now?

(A young man pulls gently on King David's robes)

YOUNG MAN

My King, I am thy humble servant, Sire.

I may know something of this thing.

If it please thee, may I speak more?

It may ease thy mind and heart some

Which art now battered and so broke by it.

KING DAVID

If words can do that, then thy words

Are richer than all my wealth in this world.

YOUNG MAN

Do not be certain Absalom

Slew all thy sons who were with him.

KING DAVID

Pray God that thou art right!

YOUNG MAN

His quarrel was with Amon since
He forced himself upon his sister once.
And ever after he did full hate him,
Although he did not speak it out to him.

KING DAVID

Why killed he all the others then?

YOUNG MAN

Be not so well persuaded that he has!
We only heard from Amon's servant, Sire,
Who fled the throng before the rest
And feared for his life when his master fell.
If even the worst thou hast dreamt
Did happen there this night, yet some escaped,
And they will come here to tell thee,
And ask for thy protection now.

(ENTER a guard)

GUARD

My Lord, I do see many men,
All riding mules at a swift pace,
Dart down the hills outside the city walls.

(ENTER young men.)

PRINCE

Dear Father, Absalom killed Amon, and

We fled, lest he should turn on us.

My brothers and myself ask thee:

Be merciful, and please preserve thy sons

KING DAVID

Thou did well to leave, my dear sons.

Thank God thou art safe, and unharmed.

Scene iii

(A room in the house of Absalom. Prince Absalom is
seated brooding)

(ENTER a servant)

SERVANT

My lord, thy servants all have left,

They fear thy Father's wrath.

Whereto must we now go?

Thy Father wilt not idly brood,

But when the mourning period doth pass

Most surely will come after thee.

ABSALOM

We've none to meet him in the field

And he hath allies all around.

ABSALOM (CONT'D)

It may be that in Ge'shur, where
Rules my grandfather, we shall get
A sympathetic hearing, and asylum yet.
To see my brother dead hath spent
The passion for it now and
All that's left is but despair for self.

SERVANT

Great is the pity here my lord
Once thou might have been king.

(EXIT Servant, Absalom moves to a wall mirror speaking
to it.)

ABSALOM

He hath said *I* 'might have been king'
I had not thought of that before.
'Gainst it, my act hath slammed the door.
For it, once, surely Amon was in store,
He'd have done to me what he did to Tamar.
The which my Father did ignore!
Amon hath, now, answered for it!
But I must leave in haste for Ge'-shur.

Scene iv

(A courtyard where a woman in mourning apparel waits.)

(ENTER King David with Joab. The woman falls down
before King David tugging on his robes)

OLD WOMAN

O King, the plea of this old woman list,
Do not turn me away without a word.

KING DAVID

Old woman, what is wrong with thee?

OLD WOMAN

I am a widow, for my husband died.
I had two sons, and both I loved,
But they loved not each other much.
One day, while working in the fields
They argued, and began to fight.
No one was there to separate the two,
One smote the other, and slew him.
Then all the people here about
Sayeth: 'Him who slew his brother give
To us that we may kill him now.'
Life for a life is only just.
It would snuff out the ember I have left.
For who will I have after that

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

To care for me when I am old.

My husband shall leave no namesake,

Nor any live remainder on this earth.

KING DAVID

Go to thy home in peace old one,

I shall give orders banning it.

OLD WOMAN

On me let all the guilt abide,

And on *my* Father's house.

Let the King and his throne be innocent.

KING DAVID

If any lays a hand on thee,

Or on thy son, bring him to me.

He shall disturb thee not, again!

OLD WOMAN

Pray let the king swear by Lord God,

That the avengers of blood slay no more.

In this land, let my son be not destroyed.

KING DAVID

As the Lord God doth live

No one shall harm thy son!

OLD WOMAN

May thy devoted servant, now

Again speak from her heart, my lord.

KING DAVID

Speak what is on thy mind and heart.

OLD WOMAN

The word of the king gives me ease.

My lord, the King, is like the angel here

Of God, deciding good and evil things.

Lord God be with thee always, Sire.

Had not thou once two stalwart boys

Who labored and did toil for Israel,

And strove against each other so?

Did not one slay his brother too?

And now their Mother, Israel,

That having lost one son, hath lost the other too,

For he must hide from an avenger here.

Just as my son did 'til my king did speak.

Can anything bring back a life?

For we are as but water, spilt upon the ground.

Which cannot be more gathered up again.

E'en the Lord God finds means,

The banished art not purged from Him.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

Thou art an angel of Lord, God,
And must decide both good and evil thus,
Let the Lord God's example guide thee in't.

KING DAVID

Hide not from me, I beg of thee,
That answer I shall ask from thee.

OLD WOMAN

I shall hide nothing from the King.

KING DAVID

Is not the hand of Joab in this thing?

OLD WOMAN

Thy servant Joab bade me speak of it,
And he did put all these words in my mouth.

KING DAVID

Ah...Joab, I shall do as I did vow,
Go and bring home the young man, Absalom.

(Falls to the ground before the king)

JOAB

Today found I grace in thy sight,
My lord, that thou fulfill my wish.
Blessed be my lord, the King, before God's eyes,
And fortunate, thy servant, in thy eyes.

Scene v

(The house of Tal'-mai, King of Ge'shur, father of Ma'-a-cah, the mother of Absalom. Absalom is by himself in his chambers.)

(ENTER a servant)

SERVANT

My Lord, thy Grandfather hath sent word,
To know what may please thee on this.

(Absalom glances into a mirror)

ABSALOM

I have kept nothing from him, he doth
Know all my wants, and hath met them well.

SERVANT

Thy Father hath sent word from Jerusalem,
That in a week's time he will dispatch Joab
To persuade his son, he should return home.

ABSALOM

Why doth my Father want my return?
Or will he have Joab murder me here?
For persuasion he hath better men!
But for a killing, there's no fitter choice.

ABSALOM (CONT'D)

Tell my Grandfather to refuse this suit.

SERVANT

My lord, as your loyal servant

May I speak openly on this?

ABSALOM

Thou mayest speak as thou desire

For thou, alone, hast come here with me

And left thy dear home and family.

SERVANT

Gracious lord, thy Father claims rights

To his son, who is flesh of his flesh.

Can a Grandfather refuse that?

Would he not claim the same right if

T'was *his* son hid in another kingdom.

And even if thy Grandfather

Refuse thy Father's request this time,

How many times can he do that,

Before King David brings an army

With him? So, consider this, great Prince:

Others may be more skillful hiding

Their design beneath their clever words,

To paint a false picture of their intent,

SERVANT (CONT'D)

Whilst, Joab, loyal soldier that he is,
Cannot so well disemble his purpose.
Tell him he must meet thee unarmed,
Alone, in thy apartments, with thy
Grandfather's soldiers hid nearby for help.

ABSALOM

If not to punish me for my offense,
Why would my Father wish me to return?

(Absalom glances again quickly into a mirror.)

SERVANT

Thou art a handsome and well spoken man.
Perhaps he wants thee back to prevent
Some faction in Israel, or outside,
Forming around thee here that might threaten
His royal Crown, or his Kingdom.

ABSALOM

Had I even such thought myself just now,
Right before thou didst say those words.
Thou dost offer reflection of my thought.
Was not my Father, *also*, a usurper?
But I had not such thought when I killed Amon.
What is it, even, to be: "King"?

ABSALOM (CONT'D)

Is't to be cowardly like my Father

Yet not be put to shame? Or banished?

The punishment instead doth fall

Upon those who act righteously.

Scene vi

(A few weeks later. Absalom in his chambers, directs
soldiers where to hide.)

(ENTER Joab)

JOAB

Prince Absalom, son of King David, Peace!

Thy Father has sent me to bring thee home.

ABSALOM

Doth he send for me to enact revenge

Upon his son for Amon's death?

JOAB

He hath assured me the avenger of blood shall

No longer take a life in Israel!

He hath sworn thou wilt *not* be harmed.

ABSALOM

My Father's known to keep

His word if he hath spoken it.

ABSALOM (CONT'D)

Still, why doth he send thee,

A man so able with a spear?

JOAB

Prince, if he had said to kill thee,

It would have been already done;

And I would not have come alone.

ABSALOM

Thou art his loyal servant true,

So there is something in thy words.

If he doth wish me dead I'll not escape.

Best for me to make preparations now to leave

This land from whence my Mother came,

And to return to holy-hilled Jerusalem.

JOAB

Thy Mother, and thy sister, and

All of thy servants will be glad

To see thy handsome face, and list

To thy most honeyed, artful speech.

ABSALOM

None listen here as well as they

Nor any do love me as they!

Say if my Father will greet me

ABSALOM (CONT'D)

Or hide his face from me and shun me.

JOAB

He loves thee, but cannot forgive thy fault.

A deep breach was op'd by thy murderous

Assault upon thy brother, Amon, and

He, yet, cannot calm the wroth in his heart.

But in time it will wear away,

Like the sharp edge of an aged stone

That grows smooth as time passes, from

The lapping water or the blowing sand.

ABSALOM

Pray that time might come sooner than

Late, and I might join his bright world again.

(This is a copyrighted but unpublished play. If the reader wishes to see the whole text of the play contact Mr. Thomalen at ethomalen@gmail.com. Thank you.)