

Avraham Mapu  
THE LOVE OF ZION  
& OTHER WRITINGS

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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letter to take to Tamar. Zimri said to Peroh, "May God favour your message and fill Tamar's heart with goodness and mercy, so that she may return to your master." And to Amnon, he said, "I will also go to Tamar and I will bring you her answer. You remain here, but do not show yourself, because we do not know how it will turn out. If Tamar should insist upon her first plan to injure you, she will put upon you such evils that you will not know how to escape from them. Go, therefore, and hide yourself yonder under the trees."

Amnon sighed and said, "If Tamar has hidden her face from me, there is no place for me to hide. The heavens will uncover my mystery."

When Zimri left Amnon, his heart raged like a tossing sea. His heart was full of treachery, murder, robbery, and rascality, like Satan who comes from the depths of hell with his destructive assistance to murder, to destroy, to confuse, to overthrow the world on the Day of Judgement, and he said to himself, "Behold, my harvest is ripe! In a little while my work will be finished and I will receive my reward in full!"

As Amnon was walking in the garden, Uze came to him and said, "Your mother and sister are in great distress because you did not come last night, and I did not tell them anything about your troubles."

"I have tried to see if I could win Tamar back again," answered Amnon. "I will know my fate in a short while, whether it is conviction or mercy. Stay with me! My heart trembles!"

"If you had listened to me in the beginning," said Uze, "all this misery would not have befallen you. The beginning of love is trouble; it is followed by treachery, and ends in tears. Her sparks do not give any light; they burn and consume the bone to the very marrow. Blessed be he who shuns it. But if you have fallen into this evil, make your heart as hard as a rock, and let not fear overcome you. There is no use crying. Even the summer heat does not dry the tears of the afflicted. There is always hope; if it does not come from heaven, it will spring forth from the earth."

## *Chapter twenty-five*

**T**he sun shone over God's city. The cattle dealers were leading their steers, sheep and fat calves to market, to exchange them for money. Other parties, bringing their wines, fruit, juice, and oil, passed Yedidiah's house on their way to market. Yedidiah and Tirzah were sitting at the window, looking at them as they passed, and Yedidiah said, "In spite of the prophecies that God hath called these days for weeping and mourning, the people are slaughtering more sheep, oxen, cows, and calves, and are buying more wine, fruit and oils than they have heretofore. It seems as though they want to fill their stomachs for a whole jubilee. The last part of the prophecy seems more true than the first—"And behold joy and gladness."

Tirzah sighed and said, "The mourning has begun in our house. You have ordered to slaughter and to prepare for Tamar's and Amnon's wedding. Everything is ready, but Tamar's spirit is not. She did not sleep all night. She cried and wept bitterly. She has taken the fancy to believe in the words of an accursed witch, whom she had

seen on a dark night and who implanted in Tamar's heart the belief that Amnon was not true to her."

"I will tell you the truth, Tirzah," answered Yedidiah. "Since Amnon came to our house, we have had no peace, and Tamar has been changing from one extreme to the other. It is best to leave her to follow the dictates of her own heart and see what God has willed for her."

"She is out in the garden, lamenting," said Tirzah. "I tried to comfort her but her grief is very heavy upon her and she would not be consoled, so I left her."

"Let us wait until tomorrow and then I shall insist that she tell me what she wants. She is eighteen years of age," said Yedidiah.

When Zimri came into the garden, he saw Tamar reading Amnon's letter. Her face showed that her anger had disappeared and that she was full of mercy and goodness. He also saw Macha standing near Tamar with the goblet of wine in her hand. Zimri did not wait until he was near Tamar, but he clasped his hands, and from the distance called out, "Throw away that abomination and have mercy on your own life!"

Tamar raised her eyes and saw Zimri approaching with a fearful darkness on his face, uttering these words, "Are you well, my mistress, are you still alive? Oh, I am half crazed from that sight! Do I see aright? Is that the goblet of wine? Oh, my God, the goblet is still full and my mistress is still alive! Blessed be the God who did not withhold his mercy from my master's house!"

Tamar stood there, startled, not knowing what to think. She kept her eyes riveted on Zimri, who was swaying to and fro, murmuring unintelligible sounds. She could endure the sight no longer and in an agonizing voice exclaimed, "Speak, Zimri, speak! Keep nothing from me!"

"There are no words to express this outrage," said Zimri, regaining his composure. "Amnon's tongue is smooth, his words are soothing, but his heart is wicked. He is planning wicked things to accomplish his purpose. That is all. Throw away that letter and the wine, and forget Amnon!"

"Zimri," exclaimed Tamar, "do you think that Amnon grew

in my heart like a blade of grass which you can pull out with your words? No, Zimri, Amnon has filled every corner of my heart! Do you want to uproot in one second all the pure plants which he planted within me all these days, or do you want to cut Amnon off from my heart as with a scythe?"

"Woe," said Zimri, pulling his hair, "Satan himself must have drawn me into this terrible calamity! I wish that I had died last night, then I should not have seen what I did."

"Look here, Zimri," said Tamar, "you are not acting wisely. Your heart is full of hell and purgatory. You came here to scare me by degrees, and you are casting darkness around me. You can inflict upon me all the tortures of hell but I will not die without knowing why I perish! Do you think that you can show me the arrow and hide the bow? I want to know who my slayer is and what weapon he prepared for me."

"Therefore," replied Zimri, "therefore, listen to me and make your heart as hard as a rock, so that it may not be shattered by my words, which will fall like a sledge-hammer on your heart. You asked me to persuade Amnon and bring him back to you. I thought that speaking to the point would not accomplish my purpose, so I used a little cunning and acted as though I did not know what had happened, and complained to him of your actions, my mistress, saying, 'I do not know what fault Tamar found with me today, but she scolded me and insulted me. She commanded me never to darken her threshold again.' Then I asked him to plead to you for me, so that you might place me in favour again. At my words, he bade his servant bring in some wine, and bade me drink. He also drank, saying, 'Drink, Zimri! Wine is good for bitter hearts.' Then he continued, 'You ask me to plead with Tamar for you. I must tell you that she is angry with me, too. She bade me also leave. Now, I will tell you my past history. Avicha bought me as a child from a stranger, and I was raised to be a shepherd. It happened that my strong arm helped to lift me from a shepherd boy to a lord, and Tamar fell in love with me. I returned her love, because she is a noble's daughter and is very rich. But Yedidiah learned of our love affair and bade me leave the

city. Then I risked my life. I went to Assyria. I ransomed Hananeel and he willed me all his wealth. Then I thought, "I am rich now and will establish myself among the lords." Tamar became jealous of me because I was so immensely wealthy. It must be that she has fallen in love with another. I wish it were so. I am wise now, too. I am no longer a shepherd, and I am no more a lost sheep. And you are wondering that she bid you leave her father's house? She even bid me to leave the land of Judea. But that does not disturb me. You think that Jerusalem is the metropolis of the whole world and that her inhabitants are before all other nations. I used to think so myself, but I do not think so now, since I have seen the great city of Nineveh. I have seen the wisest men of the East, astrologers and wizards. I have seen them all and I have become wise. Do not be afraid, Zimri. Cast your lot with mine, and, instead of being a servant to your master, you will be a master over your servants.

"I could see that there were evil thoughts in Amnon's mind and that he was planning some secret scheme to destroy you, so I threw the bait into the depths of his heart and I said, 'What do you think, Amnon, about the King of Assyria? Will he conquer Judea as he did Samaria?'"

"You have said just what I think," said Amnon, "but guard your words and say nothing about it to those who love Zion. Be sure, Zimri, that Sennacherib will put an end to Zion and lower it to the ground. He will slaughter the people like cattle and even the young will be put to death." And I said to Amnon, "What will you do with your dove if she should plead to you for protection?" And he said, "You mean my dove which is bedecked with silver? No, I will not give to the beasts the life of my dove."

Tamar aroused herself and a light shone on her countenance as she said, "Oh, how happy I am! Amnon loves me still! I wish that these last words may be the last that you will tell me."

"And I wish," said Zimri, "that I had been deaf and not heard those words. Do you want me to tell you sweet lies? Let me go!"

"Oh, you unlucky man," said Tamar. "You were not born to bring good tidings."

"I never heard Amnon speak as he did last night," said Zimri. "His words were always so sweet that God's angels could listen to them. But his words last night were so terrible that the devils would stop their ears in order that they might not hear them. He made me drink wine and beer, and he also drank more than he could stand. His frame shook, his eyes were red and he could hardly move his tongue, and he spoke such terrible words! They were words insulting to the king, to the lords and to the army. He spoke evil of the prophet Isaiah, son of Amos, and of all the scholars, his colleagues. Then he started to talk about you, saying, 'You ask me, Zimri, what I will do for my dove, eh? You shall know that she shall not be among those who will fall by the enemy's sword and she will not count among those who will perish from hunger in the time of the siege. I myself will dig her grave. She was false to me, and so I will be to her.'"

"Then I said to him, 'You always spoke so lovingly of Tamar. What caused this sudden change?' And he said, 'Oh, we say many things with our tongues but the heart thinks differently. You will see, Zimri, that I did not go to Assyria for nothing. I gained wisdom there.'"

Tamar clasped her hands over her heart, and said, "Oh, God, give me strength to bear all this!"

Then Zimri continued, "My strength left me, also, when I heard Amnon's words, but I was intoxicated with his words and with the wine I drank, and a deathly slumber fell upon me. I fell asleep, but he did not let me sleep very long, and woke me at midnight, saying, 'Come with me, and I will show you my power.' I was still as though in a dream as I accompanied him. I staggered along, not having completely slept away the effects of the wine. A dense darkness had covered the earth and the heavens. We staggered on until we came to that old deserted valley, called Tophet. 'Behold, behold!' I heard a girl's voice calling, 'Behold, mother, my youth, Amnon, my lover comes!' And the mother answered, 'The altar is built. Light the fire and show your lover, Amnon, your power over all the fierce creatures of the world.' While she was still talking, an odor of burning sulphur and tar reached my nostrils, and a green and yellowish light

ascended from the altar. By that light, I saw a very graceful woman and a beautiful girl, with their luxuriant hair hanging loosely down their backs. Standing over the burning altar, they fanned the flame with the black mantles with which they were enveloped, and mumbled these words: 'Burn! burn! Thou hellish fire, and kindle a hellish jealousy in Tamar's heart! Let thy flames burn her to a cinder!' Then the girl approached Amnon and said, 'Break your covenant with Tamar.' Amnon kissed her hand, saying, 'I despise Tamar and her riches, and with you, love, I shall live forever.'

"Now, I want to have witnesses to our covenant," said the girl. Forthwith she uttered an incantation and immediately a terrible storm arose over the valley, and an unclean wind brought with it from all the four corners of the earth wild beasts. The lions and the leopards roared fiercely, the bears growled loudly, the wolves howled dismally, and the wild boars snorted wildly. After these, a whole multitude of winged creatures circled above their heads; these were eagles, hawks, and ossifrages, and the different shrieks of each could be distinctly heard above the roar of the storm. I could also distinguish all sorts of crawling insects, snakes, and serpents. While I was wondering at all this, the dead began to come from the earth, moving nearer and nearer to the altar. Then I saw Satan standing on the altar and evil spirits dancing around the fire. A deathly fear took possession of me, and I called, 'God, oh, my God, where am I?' As I uttered these words, one of the spirits came and shook me, saying, 'Silence! Do not mention the name of God here. The fearful king, Satan, reigns here. Bow down and worship him.'

"Then the girl approached the fierce lion and took his beard in her hands, and led him to the altar. She killed him and put him upon the fire, and, sprinkling his blood on the altar and upon Amnon, said, 'This is the blood of the covenant between you and me, and at the same time it breaks the covenant between you and Tamar, made at the feet of the lion which you killed when you saved her life.' The mother slew two wild boars, and a part of these she burned on the altar and the rest she put into a large caldron. She filled a huge ves-

sel with wine, some of which she poured on the altar, and with the rest she filled some goblets.

"The girl called forth in a loud voice, 'Thou, Satan, and all these fearful beasts, shall be witnesses to our covenant!' Then she uttered another incantation, and all their fearful vision disappeared. Shortly after, they sat down at a table and ate the meat from the fearful sacrifice, and drank the wine. What they did not drink they put into a bottle and put some poison into it. They called me to feast with them, but I could not taste anything, because I was sick. The maiden then said to me, 'If you mention a word of what you have seen, your life will be forfeited.' Amnon made merry with these two women. The sight of all that I had seen and heard made me almost insane. My strength left me and a heaviness possessed me, and I fell asleep. When I awoke I was in Amnon's room.

"I arose early, and I saw Amnon give Peroh this goblet of wine and a letter to carry to you, and he said to me, 'I showed you, Zimri, how fearful I can be. Now I will show you my scheme, but do not say a word to anyone.' As Amnon left the room for a moment, I stole out and I said to myself, 'I will hasten to my mistress and tell her everything, let come what may of it.' Oh, how fortunate the goblet is still full and my mistress is still alive!"

At the conclusion of Zimri's story, Tamar awoke as from an awful dream. She seemed dazed, and in a hoarse voice said, "Oh, my head, my head, it is in a whirl! The earth moves around me and a mist is falling over my eyes. Come, Macha, hold me. I feel very faint."

"It is impossible," said Macha, "that Zimri could have seen all that in one night. He must have dreamed it. Let us test the wine and then we can see whether he spoke the truth." So Macha took the dove, which Teman had given Tamar on the Mount of Olives, and poured a few drops of wine into the beak. The little dove flapped its wings and then fell dead at the feet of its mistress. A shiver passed through Tamar's frame, and her face turned ashen pale. And Macha said, "Who would think that there was death in that goblet!"

"And what shall I say?" said Tamar. "I will say to the mountains,

'Cover me up!' And to the rocks, 'Fall upon me!' My destroyer has accomplished his end today!"

Zimri, pulling his hair and dissembling agony, said, "Would that I had died last night instead of that poor innocent dove. I would have been spared that terrible sight. Gather all your strength, Tamar, my mistress, and crush the head of the serpent that wants to bite your feet."

Tamar was so overcome with grief that she could not utter another word, and Zimri, frightened, lest his words had caused her speechlessness, said in vindication of himself, "You insisted, my mistress, that I should tell you all that I knew."

When Tamar regained her voice, she said, "How is it that the sight of all that sorcery did not affect you when the mere repetition of it caused me to lose all my strength and spirit?"

"I am a man, and Amnon is a perfect stranger to me; therefore, my mistress, make him also a stranger to you and forget him and his deeds. I warn and I charge you, in the name of God, not to mention a word of what I have told you, for I am afraid of Amnon."

And Tamar angrily said, "Oh, you coward, you have said enough! Leave me!"

Tamar left the garden and went to her rooms. Her father came to her and said, "What has befallen you, my daughter? You are like a shadow. Why do you hide your troubles from your father? Can I not help you?"

Tamar fell in her father's embrace, and, weeping bitterly, answered, "Forgive, father, the faults of your wretched daughter. I did not listen to your advice. As an innocent girl I met Amnon and fell in love with him, but now, alas, I see with my own eyes how great is his wickedness. He has steeped his soul in wickedness and henceforth I cast him off. Pray, father, do not let grandfather know what has happened. I have brought all this trouble into your house and I will free the house of it!"

Yedidiah shook his head and answered, "Woe is to me, and woe is to you, my daughter, that you did not confide in your father! Write a letter to Amnon and in it reproach him bitterly, and bid him

never to enter our house again. I also knew about his wickedness, but waited in silence to see how far he would carry it."

Tamar wept, "Alas, it is true! Amnon went wrong. The heavens are crying because of his sins. The angels above weep bitterly over his lost soul. Even the hell below shudders at his wickedness. Leave me, father; I am sick at heart. I feel guilty when I look at you, because I did not harken to your words."

As Yedidiah left Tamar, Hananeel came into the room. When he saw her grief, he said, "What is it, my daughter?"

Weeping bitterly, Tamar answered, "Do not try to comfort me. You have seen many things during your long life. You have seen good times and also reverses. You have seen me happy, but a misfortune has befallen me. A disease came upon me and I lost my love for Amnon in the day for which I hoped so long."

Hananeel was perplexed when he heard these words, and said, "Pray to God, my child, and He will help you." And he left her, going to Tirzah and Yedidiah to consult about sending to Gil-ead for a doctor and remedies for Tamar's ills. And Tamar's sadness turned to a bitter anger. At noon she went to her room to pour out her bitterness to Amnon in a letter. Her mother insisted that she tell the reason for this sudden change, and Tamar said, "Please do not force me now. First, I will make the wicked Amnon leave the country. Then I will tell you all the outrages he committed, which I have seen with my own eyes."

"Woe is to me, my daughter, that you are taking so much upon yourself—to love and to despise as your fancy wills. Remember what Amnon did for you and for my father."

"If Amnon could live a thousand years," said Tamar, "and live them in righteousness and goodness, his last wicked act would wipe out all of them. You know, dear mother, how passionately I loved him. I rejoiced when I heard his name mentioned; and now a deadly fear comes over me when I hear it. Leave me to my grief."

As Tirzah left her, Uze approached Tamar and said, "Your lover, Amnon, is impatiently waiting for an answer to his letter, dear lady."

"Is he still in Zion?" asked Tamar. "Let him hasten and leave the city before every gate in the city is locked against him. A revengeful sword hangs over his head. Tell him that his smooth, false tongue will lead him to his destruction."

And Tirzah, who had not gone very far, overheard this dialogue, and coming forward, said, "Tell Amnon that he has only himself to blame and that God will lead him in the path that he has chosen for himself, and will reward him according to his deeds."

"Come back at twilight," said Tamar to Uze, "and I will give you a letter to take to the destroyer of both our lives."

Uze went away with a bitter heart, and after delivering the message, he went to Amnon's mother and told her what had befallen Amnon. Naame clasped her hands and said, "That was the only calamity that had not yet befallen me. Now desolation and destruction, like twins, come to me. Tell Amnon to get himself ready to leave and that my daughter and I will meet him in Bethlehem. Sisry will be there also."

But, alas, this last hope of seeing Amnon once more was not permitted to the distracted mother. Yedidiah had put a watch upon her and her daughter, and they were taken prisoners to answer the charge of witchery before the elders.

## Chapter twenty-six

*My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me!  
The night of my pleasure hath be turned into fear unto me.*

Isaiah xxxi, 4

THE sun was declining and sent her last rays upon the tree tops of the Mount of Olives. Amnon, having become impatient at the delay of Peroh with Tamar's answer, walked towards the city and sat down, very much disheartened, by a little brook which ran into the River Kidron. He mused thus to himself: "How sweet and peaceful does this clear stream babble! It shines like crystal and is as blue as the azure sky, but its pure clear water does not empty into a river as clear. It falls into Kidron, into which the refuse of the city is cast. Oh, alas, like this quiet brook, so quiet and peaceful, were my thoughts and my life! And like this brook, my life turns into a mournful and desolate life. My peaceful days did not last—days of misery took their place. Love came to me like a suckling. It grew and grew to the size of a giant, but I did not know that this giant had sharpened his sword to destroy me. He destroyed within me all the truthful plans which I had cherished and brought up with an innocent heart and clean hands. Oh, my spirit rebels within me, and my soul is bursting its bonds,

and my heart is like a tossing sea on a stormy day!" Musing thus, he left the brookside and wandered back to the Mount of Olives, and he heard Uze calling from the trees, "Hurry, Amnon, hurry!"

"Oh, I was waiting so impatiently for you," said Amnon. "What is the news? And what have you in your hand?"

"Oh," answered Uze, "I have in my hand a sledge hammer, which I fear will kill you." And he gave Amnon the letter which Tamar had written, and the goblet of wine which she had returned, and said, "So spoke Tamar: 'This letter shall be the document of our divorce, to cut off all the bonds between us forever. Let him drink the wine, and he will forget his sweetness and his love.' When I went away with the letter and the wine, Macha came running after me, and said, 'Let not Amnon drink that wine. Tomorrow morning I shall come to him and tell him all the fearful things I know about Tamar. She has become unmerciful to him and she seeks his life.'"

Amnon opened the letter, which read as follows:

As a grape-gatherer selects the grapes for the baskets, and as the gleaner gathers the sheaves, so will I select and gather our sweet words, spoken when God united our hearts on the memorable and painful day. 'My friend', 'my lover', 'my companion', 'love of my heart'—these are the names I called you.

You called me 'dove', 'my beloved', 'my heart's idol', 'my only one', 'the only one in the whole world for me'. So sweet and smooth were your words! But your hands! Oh, they have dug the grave for me! Your lips are like roses, but the thoughts of your heart are like thorns. Is that what you have decided to do to 'your dove', to 'your only one'?

Oh, you miserable fiancé! Let us cease cooing like doves and talking of love and friendship, and the sweet future. Let us rather choose to growl at each other like the bears and to howl like the leopards. Listen to my howling and to the roar of my soul! Listen, if you are not deaf like a serpent, like an unmerciful serpent.

Oh, but what shall I say? What shall I say! Your ears are stuffed up like your heart. You have sucked the milk of reptiles and the venom of serpents. Where is that Amnon who came like a helping angel to save my life from the fierce lion? Oh, my heart breaks within me when I have to ask! Where is that Amnon of Bethlehem, the savior of my life, and that same Amnon, who schemed to take that life once given away?

If I should mention your deeds, I am afraid that God would be so angered that he would lay waste the whole land of Judea. You shook the throne of God with your wickedness. Oh, be but a moment the Amnon of before, and think to whom you have done this thing! To your innocent partner, to your 'dove', to your 'only one', whom you said you would not exchange for all the wealth and treasures of the Kings and rulers of the world!

I have seen you as a blooming youth and have planted you in my heart, and in the day of my planting you blossomed. But woe is to you—you ripened into wormwood and gal! And woe is to me, that I must tear you from my heart, even if by the act I break my heart into pieces! You have wounded me with your smooth tongue and have broken me with your wicked deeds. You did not let the wild beasts destroy me, so that you yourself might destroy me.

Run away, therefore, seeker of my life. Run to the place where the mountains are smoking and the seas are roaring. Go where the lions hide themselves. Hide in the holes of the reptiles, but even there your wickedness will be found out. You are worse than they. The lion loves his mate and the reptiles have mercy on their young, but you have destroyed the life of your benefactor and lover. Run away, unmerciful serpent! Do not again try to ensnare me with your smooth tongue. Run for your life! Why should I see your blood flow before me like water?



A revengeful fire burns in the hearts of my relatives, and if they reach you, they will take your life without mercy in their revenge. Perhaps you will ask me, 'Where shall I flee from them?' Why, you know the way which leads to hell and the path that good people shun! There is where you should go! That is the path you began with and that you shall follow until your heart shall break with remorse, and your last days end in repentance.

When Amnon finished reading this letter, he tore his hair and rent his clothes, and groaned from the depths of his heart in his agony, and exclaimed, "Oh, day of trouble and perplexity, God confounded our speech! A letter full with pleading and mercy I sent her. In her answer, she sent me this, full of scathing words and merciless commands. She accused me of deadly crimes, even of murder, seeking her life. This cannot be Tamar's doings. There must be some mysterious enemy of mine who is at the bottom of this, and Tamar is childish enough to believe it. I will go and throw myself before her. On my knees I will beg and cry, and maybe she will listen to my pleadings and turn her heart to me again as before!"

"Do not go, Amnon," said Uze. "Do not hasten to your death. Her maid, Macha, told me to tell you that she will come tomorrow and tell you everything. She said that Tamar had become a terror, and seeks your life. There is poison in the wine that Tamar sent, so that you might drink of it and die. Why did that wicked girl not drink it herself?"

"Silence, Uze," commanded Amnon. "You break my heart when you speak harshly of Tamar!"

"Go then, if death is so dear to you! Go and meet her, but remember do not perish without vindicating yourself, and remember also that you have someone to live for. Run away, therefore, for your life!"

"Not for my life, but from my life, I will run," said Amnon.

"You must fulfill your mother's commands. She wishes you to

go to Bethlehem," said Uze. "They will meet you there and you will also find Sisry in the house of my master, Avicha."

Amnon awoke as from a dream, and, not having heard Uze's words, said, "Go quickly to Tamar, to my turtle dove, and tell her that her lover, Amnon, waits impatiently for her under the olive tree, upon which our names are carved—that I have so many things to tell her, compared with which what I have told her during all the time of our love is as nothing to what I have to tell her now."

"Do not deceive yourself any longer," said Uze. "Run away. The sun has set."

"That is right," said Amnon. "I will run to the gates of hell. My sun has set at midday. See, all the winged creatures have gone to their nests, but when will rest come back to my heart? Let me feast a little longer on this glorious sight of the stately trees and the Mount of Olives, where I spent so many happy hours with my beloved Tamar. Oh, who could foresee that there would ever come a time when I, in such distress, should have to muster all my strength and courage to run away from my only treasure in this whole world! Woe to that long desired evening in which I anticipated so much joy, and which should have become an evening of mourning! Tomorrow should have been my wedding day. Over yonder is my palace, but who will be there with Tamar? Oh, ye mountains and thou great city, to which I was so faithful, tell Tamar that I am innocent, that I am not that bloodthirsty Amnon she thinks me, but that I am accused of crimes that I never committed! Peace be with you, City of God, and peace be with you, my beloved Tamar! I have no gall. I cannot be angry with you, most beautiful of women. May God never be angry with you!"

As Amnon was speaking, Teman, on horseback, came riding towards him. He alighted when near Amnon, and said, "Mount this horse and fly for your life, before the bloody sword of revenge shall overtake you." Then Teman turned and walked away, not heeding Amnon's voice calling to him.

Amnon then said to Uze, "Go quickly and bring my mother and my sister, for I cannot linger there." And he rode towards Bethlehem.

When Teman reached home, he went to Tamar's room and found her still weeping, and he said, "Now, my sister, forget your old lover and prepare yourself for Azrikam. God has willed you for him and father has betrothed you to him. The elders will be here tonight and Azrikam will be betrothed to you in their presence."

Hananeel just then entered the room and said, "No, my daughter, not to Azrikam have I given my wealth, and that will never be. You shall never be Azrikam's wife."

"Oh, dear father," said Tamar, "save me from Azrikam's hands! Let me not see him in the day of my distress! Let Azrikam not think that I must love him in spite of myself. I hate him! I abhor him! I cannot bear the sight of his face! I have known one man, and if he could turn false to me, there is not another man on the face of the earth."

"Maybe Amnon's sins are not so great as your father thinks," said Hananeel. "It is impossible that an upright man like Amnon should so suddenly become so wicked as he is accused of being. Shortly the two women shall be brought here and then the judges will question them."

And while they were speaking, Tirzah came into the room and said, "The two wicked women are already here. It is no wonder that Amnon fell in love with the girl. She is as beautiful as Venus. I have never seen anyone like her in my life." And Tamar trembled. "Where is Macha?" she asked in surprise. But Macha was no longer there, for she had left the city in search of Amnon.

## *Chapter twenty-seven*

**N**aame and Peninah were standing downcast in a corner of the room in Yedidiah's house. Naame's face was very heavily veiled, but Peninah wore no veil at all. Officers closely watched them. Yedidiah called Teman and Tamar into the room, and sent one of his servants for Zimri.

When Tamar entered and looked upon the two women, she stepped back with a shudder, and said, "Oh, father, these are the unmerciful mother and the wicked daughter who have ensnared such a noble heart and who put poison into the wine which Amnon sent me! They were not satisfied to ruin the heart of my choice but they wished to end my life also."

Naame was so surprised that she could not say a word, and only clasped her hands in silence. And Teman recognized his Rose of Carmel, and his eyes filled with tears, but his lips were silent, because of his emotions.

Yedidiah broke the silence, by saying, "Tell me, you wicked women, how long have you known Amnon?"

Peninah answered, "If false witnesses have falsely testified against us, take my life, for I am a girl and alone, without hopes, and I do not care to live in a land which is so corrupt, but leave my mother in peace."

By that time Zimri had entered the room, and looked frightened when he saw the two women.

"Do not be afraid of them," said Yedidiah. "They may have power in the valley of Tophet but here their spell is broken."

"Listen to me, you women," said Zimri. "With truthfulness God created the world and encircled the heavens, so the people should gird themselves with truth, and with mercy and truth God forgives iniquities. We must sow to reap mercy."

And Naame answered, "Bring the man who accuses me, face to face with me, and let him repeat his accusations. How have I sinned before God?"

"Silence, you accursed witch," said Tamar. "How dare you mention the name of God! Call Satan and bring forth, with your incantations, the fearful creatures of the darkness, and employ your witchcraft! Then perhaps you will find him who accuses you!"

"Where is Amnon?" asked Hananeel. "Surely you will not deny that you know him." And turning to the young girl, Hananeel continued, "Did Amnon fall in love with you? You cannot hope for mercy if you tell lies."

Peninah cried bitterly, and said, "God shall judge our innocence."

"Lock them in a room upstairs until the elders come," said Yedidiah to the officers. "They will make them tell the truth." Then he said to Tamar, "Go and tell Azrikam to come here."

"Oh, have mercy, dear father!" cried Tamar. "Do not give me into the hands of that wicked man!"

"You see, my daughter, these are the fruits of following the dictates of your own heart."

"Let Peroh come here," said Hananeel, "and let us do noth-

ing until Amnon himself comes to face his accusers, and give him an opportunity to vindicate himself."

While Hananeel was talking, Avicha, leaning on the arm of his brother Sisry, entered the room. Yedidiah responded to the greeting with a sad face. "I was very sick," said Avicha, "but with God's will I have recovered, and I am here to rejoice with you on the wedding day of Amnon and Tamar, which occurs tomorrow."

"You are an old man," said Yedidiah, "and you will see wondrous and curious things. Devils will dance around his wedding-canopy and the wild beasts will rejoice at his wedding feast."

And Sisry, very much surprised, asked, "What do you mean, Yedidiah?"

"Amnon was raised by you," answered Yedidiah, "and you do not know that he took himself a girl who reigns in the desolate places in the darkness of the night, and who enrages hell with her words."

"God must have turned the heavens and the earth, and the angels of heaven descended into hell, and all the despised of God ascended to heaven," said Sisry.

"Amnon was not satisfied," said Yedidiah, "that he stole himself into my house and disturbed its peace, but he even brought discord into the family."

"Your queer words force me to answer you," said Sisry. "I always told you that your blind trust in people was foolish and would lead to no good. Now you say that Amnon has disturbed the peace of your house. Therefore, listen to me, my lord. There are three things which disturb the peace—two of them are walking with their heads up and they the righteous shun. But the third hides himself in the dark and he ensnares the innocent. If any enemy comes to our land to disturb our peaceful dwellings, we depend upon the strength of God to conquer him. Law-breakers, when they spread their villainy to rob people and do injustice, the judge will deal out justice to them and they are punished accordingly. War and rascality do not last forever. The sword of war is put back into its sheath, the strong arm of the rascal is broken and peace is restored. But rascality, which is covered by the mantle of piety, if it is not punished by God, is never

punished by law. That kind of rascal mingles among the righteous and destroys them ere they are aware of it. They are like reptiles, which are covered with a beautiful green spotted skin and crawl among flowers and bite the passersby, leaving their poisonous venom in their feet; and when the passerby looks to see whence the bite came, they can find nothing, the reptile having crawled quickly and stealthily back again among the flowers. Therefore, Yedidiah, my lord and my friend, do not pass your judgement upon Amnon before his enemies testify against and prove his guilt. These enemies are raising havoc in your home but you do not know it."

"Your words are true," interrupted Hananeel, "but where is Amnon?"

"He must be in Bethlehem," said Sistry. "Perhaps he has heard of Avicha's illness and gone thither."

"Let two messengers on horseback speed to Bethlehem and bring Amnon back," said Yedidiah.

Just then Tirzah came into the room and said, "Macha has gone, no one knows whither. This must have some significance."

Yedidiah then turned to Zimri and said, "Will you swear to Amnon's guilt to his face?"

Zimri trembled at these words, but he concealed his confusion, and with great composure said, "You will pardon me if I ask you why you do not insist that the elders examine these two women and learn what they do and who they are. I have heard much about them and I can testify about their old and their new wickedness."

A dense darkness has enveloped God's city. Everything is silent, only occasionally is heard the voice of the sentinel calling, "Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep!" And the watchmen in the streets, singing:

*Thrice happy are they who peacefully rest,  
With conscience untouched and with righteousness blessed;  
Their hearts are at rest, their souls are at peace,*

*But sleep to the wicked brings never surcease.  
From doers of evil is banished sweet sleep,  
And the sinners night vigils of misery keep.*

And one watchman said to the other, "Look! Look yonder to the south! See how red the sky is? A huge tongue of fire seems to rise and fall again! What can it mean?"

"You are right," said the other, "but it is changing to a heavy smoke, which is enveloping the whole south side of the city. Let us hurry thither; maybe they need help."

And five of the watchmen hastened to the place whence the flames came. As they turned the corner they heard someone talking to himself, saying, "I put the sword into her heart, and they whom I reared would disclose my secrets will be consumed by fire in a little while. But why should I tremble so? Oh, my mind is wandering! Fears such as I cannot name come over me. These large palaces are dancing before my eyes like so many evil spirits, and the towers are like huge monsters which want to devour me. I am mad! I wander like a wild wolf in the darkness of the night. The heavens weigh down upon me and the earth trembles beneath me. A fearful voice is roaring in my ears, 'Keep out of the road, you unclean mind!' Oh, woe is to me! I am unclean! My mother's blood is dripping from my fingers! The waters from the great ocean cannot wash away the stains. And all the waters in the world cannot put out the fire which I myself kindled to burn my own father. Oh, where shall I go? Where shall I go? I am going to die in shame and disgrace!"

"You have told the truth," said one of the watchmen. "Seize him," he said to his comrades. "You have confessed your guilt. Now tell me who you are, for you cannot long keep it secret. The night does not last forever, and with the morning's sun all the secrets of the night are uncovered." While the watchman was talking, he and his comrades met some officers, who, returning from the fire, said, "A great calamity has happened in the city. A terrible fire is raging and it looks like the work of some incendiary."

"I think we have the right man in our hands," said one of the

watchmen. "After we heard the fearful confession from his own lips, he became as quiet as a lamb, and would not give his name."

"Let us take him to Yedidiah's house," said the officer. "The judges are all assembled there. The victims from the fire will also be brought there. Come, let us hasten thither."

The judges had all taken their respective seats around the table in Yedidiah's house, and Zimri was telling them what he had seen in the valley of Tophet. The two poor women were standing astounded, weeping, for they could not find any words with which to deny his accusations. Tamar, who was in the next room, was weeping for grief and anger. In the midst of this scene, the officers brought Azrikam into the house. When Azrikam saw Zimri, he pulled out his sword from under his coat and rushing to him, stabbed him through the heart, and said, "Instead of silver, I give you steel!"

"Oh, murder!" cried the judges.

Azrikam, crazed as one who is possessed with an evil spirit, rushed with drawn sword towards Naame and Peninah, but Teman rushed upon him from behind, and catching him by the neck, hurled him away. The officers then took the sword from him and bound him as they were commanded by the judges.

Tamar, hearing the uproar, came into the room, and was bewildered at what she saw. Zimri groaned in his death agonies, "Woe is to me! Amnon is innocent! I and Azrikam are guilty!" All assembled looked at each other in amazement, and Avicha and Sisry looked at each other in triumph. Suddenly a great uproar was heard outside and the officers said, "They are bringing the victims of the fire." The door opened and Uchon's children came in with their hands clapping their heads, moaning and weeping, "Oh, our brother, Nabal, has committed a double murder! He locked up our father and Hephher and Bukkiah in a room, and set the house afire! And when our mother came near him, he stabbed her with his sword!"

"And who is Nabal?" asked all present. "Who is Nabal?"

And Uchon's children said, "Why, this wicked Nabal, our brother from one father and mother, who called himself Azrikam, the son of Yoram."

Then the judges ordered that the victims be brought in, and Uchon's children said, "Our father and Hephher and Bukkiah are still alive. We saved them from the flames, but they are like cinders." The officers brought Uchon, Hella, Hephher and Bukkiah into the room. Hella was already dead and Uchon, Hephher and Bukkiah were so burned that they were hardly recognizable. They were groaning bitterly with agony. "Woe," cried Uchon, "God is just! He punished me according to my sins. Eighteen long years ago, Matan, the justice, tempted me to set fire to the home of Haggit, whom he hated. I burned her and her three children with her. And my son Nabal, I called 'Azrikam', the boy who was burned. And I put the blame on my good mistress, the innocent Naame, the wife of my master."

"Woe," cried Hephher and Bukkiah, "these are our wounds! We are to blame for all this! We emptied all Yoram's treasures into Matan's house and we falsely testified against Naame before the judges and degraded her innocent name, and then we put fire to Matan's house when the evil spirit possessed him."

"Woe is to me," Uchon repeated. "The gentle Naame, with her daughter, is living in a little hut at the gate of the valley. Go, bring her back, and reinstate her in her husband's possessions."

"Woe is to me," groaned Zimri in his delirium. "I have falsely testified against Amnon and these two women, whom I have never seen until today."

Everybody in the room was astonished at these confessions. Yedidiah and Tirzah clasped their hands and shook their heads in remorse.

And Tamar said to Teman, "Is it any wonder that Amnon fell in love with Yoram's daughter, such a beauty? What am I in comparison to her? Amnon is innocent!"

And Tirzah approached Naame and before anyone realized her purpose, she raised the veil from Naame's face. They recognized and embraced each other, and wept in silence.

And Hananeel cried, "Where is the rescuer of my life and the heir of my wealth?"

Yedidiah approached Naame and said, "Forgive me, honoured

wife of my friend Yoram. With fire and sword has God dealt justice to those who wronged you. I insulted you, not knowing who you were."

And Teman fell at his father's feet, and said, "Have mercy on me, father."

Yedidiah raised him, saying, "What is it, my son?"

"There is the girl I have loved for almost two years," said Teman. "I love her more than my life. She loves me also, but she was afraid to make herself known to me because they were wronged by false testimony, and she feared lest she bring trouble upon me. My life depends upon her. I am naught without her."

"This is no time to speak of love," broke in Naame. "We must remove the hatred which exists between us. Tell me, gentle Tamar, what evil did you see in my daughter and myself that you have insulted us and called us accursed witches?"

"My love for Amnon," said Tamar, "was the cause. I saw him making love to your daughter, and jealousy kindled such a fire within me that it almost crazed me. Oh, if I could remain with your daughter and be also a wife to Amnon, together with her!"

"Oh, you hasty child," said Sisry. "Do you think that General Yoram's daughter should be the wife of a shepherd? Now, listen to me, gentle maiden, and listen all assembled here, and I will complete the tale: Amnon, the shepherd, and Peninah are twins, which Naame bore after the calamity which befell her. Amnon was raised by my brother Avicha, and Peninah and her mother lived in Carmel, as gleaners on Yoram's fields. Everyone in Carmel called Peninah the 'Rose of Carmel,' because of her rare beauty."

"Mother! Sister!" cried Tamar, and she embraced Naame and Peninah. The strain was too much for Tamar and she fell to the floor in a faint. Yedidiah and Tirzah carried her to her room and put her to bed. Then Naame said to Teman, "Send messengers on horseback to bring Amnon back from Bethlehem." And Teman did as Naame bade him. And the judges, seeing that Yedidiah's house was in confusion, returned to their homes.

Zimri was tossing in death agonies. His throat was dry, his

cheeks were becoming pallid and his eyes were bulging from their sockets, and becoming fixed and glassy. He had his gaze directed upon Azrikam, who lay near, bound in chains.

Azrikam said to Zimri, "Who put the poison in the wine and who tempted me to do all these wicked things! You, Zimri—you took upon yourself a quarrel in which you were not concerned, only for the money that you might receive thereby."

"Oh, Zimri," exclaimed Teman, "you hypocrite! You are dumb in your agonies. You hear Nabal's insults and yet you cannot deny them. Oh, you model of piety! You used to offer sacrifices and repent to God for that which you spoke with your lips and saw with your eyes, and that which you heard with your ears and even that which you smelled with your nostrils; and for what sin have you sacrificed today these human beings and made them burnt offerings? You are still gazing at me, oh, you poisonous reptile! Shortly your eyes will fall into their sockets and your serpent tongue will become dry in your throat, and you will cease hissing, like the snake that you are! You have defiled the sacred incense with your deeds, and with your wrathful tongue you have turned the rose to wormwood and heaven to hell! Now God sends you there with a broken heart, and God has sweetened all that you have made bitter."

"Now, my son," said Naame, "you can understand my riddle in Tophet. You can see the thorns which surround the rose and have caused all her troubles. But the thorns have been burned and death has consumed them. That miserable Nabal wanted to ensnare my daughter in his net, and promised to reinstate her in his possessions, which did not belong to him. When my daughter refused him, he attempted to kill her."

"Oh," cried Nabal, "come, Teman, thrust thy sword through me! I am full of shame and remorse. Release me from this wretched life!"

"No, you reptile," said Teman, "I will not soil my sword with your wicked blood. You will be thrown out into the fields, and the fox and the crows will feed on you."

Tirzah came from Tamar's room, and said to Teman, "Let them

clear the house of these victims, so that we may not see them again." Then Nabal was given over to his brothers, who could do with him as they pleased.

Tirzah led Naame and Peninah into Tamar's room. Tamar, who had recovered from her swoon, embraced them and said, with tears in her eyes, "Satan came up from the depths of hell to play havoc with us. Oh, had we heard all this a few days ago, then my lover would not have gone away. Now, forgive me, my dears; I have inflicted pain upon you unknowingly." Both Naame and Peninah wept at Tamar's grief and repentance. And Tamar continued, "God wiped away your tears today, and your honour and innocence are restored. But who can feel my agony? I loved Amnon when he had no name. How great must be my grief when I know that I have cast away the son of Yoram, a lord in Judea and the lord of my youth? Oh, woe is me! I sent him from me without thought, and who knows if he will ever return?"

Yedidiah very humbly said to Sisry, "You were always right. I am ashamed of myself. I learned just tonight how foolish I have been—a shudder will always pass over me when I think of it. I did not heed your advice when you told me how to study people's characters, but tonight Zimri taught me wisdom, for destructive fires and floods of water and wild beasts cannot destroy and do as much damage as a dishonest man cloaked in a righteous mantle. How fearful are thy punishments, oh God, and how wonderful are thy judgments!"

"And I thank God that Amnon is innocent and that my dream came true, and that, with God's help, Amnon will return and mitigate our grief," said Hananeel. Then turning to Naame and Peninah, he continued, "Now, gentle ladies, be prepared to take possession of your inheritance tomorrow, which has been in strange hands for so many years."

"Now," said Teman to Peninah, "let me take the sweet out of the bitter, and let the sapphire be restored to the ring."

"Let Amnon come. Then we will unite all of you," answered Naame.

All present, not understanding these words, looked at each

other and then at Teman, as if for explanation. Teman forthwith related everything that had occurred from the time that he had met Peninah in Carmel up to the present day.

"God knows," said Yedidiah, "how strong my friendship was for Yoram, and now I see that the friendship has extended even to our children. Now, gentle Naame, establish yourself in your possessions and hope to Him, who always protects the lovers of Zion, that the clouds will entirely disappear from over your head."

Then Tamar spoke, "Your righteousness came forth like the rising sun! So may the sun shine upon me and bring back my Amnon. I know that Amnon will forgive me, because my love was stronger than death; therefore, my jealousy was as deep as the grave."

That terrible night had passed. It ended with the destruction of all the wicked, who died in agony. Even Nabal was killed by his brothers, in revenge for the death of their parents. The same day, Yedidiah and his family accompanied Naame and her daughter to their new home. Avicha and Sisry were persuaded to remain with Naame as her guests, until the turbulent days should pass.

The news had spread that Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, had passed the River Prose and that the people from the neighbouring villages had hastened to Zion because it was fortified. The messengers, who had been sent in search of Amnon, returned at eventide, and told Yedidiah the following: "We arrived in Bethlehem and inquired for Amnon, and a shepherd told us, 'Amnon came to my house last night and was impatiently waiting for his mother and sister. Seeing that they did not come, he hastily wrote something. When he finished, I saw tears in his eyes. He gave me the letter, which was addressed to Tamar, Yedidiah's daughter, and bade me deliver it. He left before morning, and I do not know where he went. Here is the letter, my lord.'" Then he continued, "The shepherds seized Peroh, Amnon's servant, on the outskirts of Bethlehem. He had fallen upon Macha, Tamar's maid, and stabbed her. We have brought Peroh and the maid, who is dying, with us."

When Yedidiah read the letter, he wept and told the messengers not to say a word to anyone, so that Tamar should not learn of the

letter. "Tell Tamar that Amnon has joined a party, which immigrated to Tarshish with the wealthy of Judea." Just then Tamar entered the room, and Yedidiah hastily hid the letter. Tamar, however, noticed the tears on Yedidiah's cheeks, and said, "Why, father, what is it? You have been weeping!"

"Ask the messengers," answered Yedidiah. And they told what Yedidiah had instructed them to say.

Tamar, in despair, clasped her hands and exclaimed, "Oh, father, my life is cut off!"

"Do not be downcast and do not murmur, my daughter. Do not mourn for those who left Zion. Weep for those who remain here, whose lives are in danger. Would you feel satisfied to live here with your husband when the city is besieged? Compose yourself, my daughter, and hope to God, who guides the steps of the righteous, and he will surely bring Amnon back to you in the day of peace."

Yedidiah, Avicha, Sistry, and Hananeel all tried to comfort Tamar, but in vain. Her grief was inconsolable. But only the sight of the city's misery alleviated her grief and made her think of helping the needy.

When Macha was questioned, she said, "I am going to die, why shall I not confess? I loved Amnon from the day I first saw him, and I conspired with Azrikam to blacken Amnon's character, and I tempted Peroh, who was in love with me, to join us in the same plot. When Amnon's enemies had succeeded in making Amnon run away, I followed him. But I did not know that Peroh was watching me and following me. However, he was, and, gaining on me, he stabbed me. Had it not been for the shepherds, I should have now been dead."

When Yedidiah questioned Peroh, his confession corresponded with Macha's so they knew that they had both at last spoken the truth. Both Peroh and Macha were imprisoned until judgement should be passed upon them.

## *Chapter twenty-eight*

**I**n the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib threatened Judea with war, and King Hezekiah, not wishing to plunge his kingdom into a great war, sent to the wicked Sennacherib, King of Assyria, as agreed, all the wealth of the treasures, and even the golden doors of the Holy Temple, as a peace-offering, amounting to three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. All this Sennacherib accepted and the terms it implied, but his wickedness overmastered him, and he sent a large army, led not by himself but by his commander, Rabshakeh, to the walls of Jerusalem. At this time of our story, Jerusalem was besieged by Rabshakeh and his vast army. The city was in great distress, for, knowing that Hezekiah had sued for peace and that Sennacherib had agreed upon the terms, the city had not provided itself with sufficient provisions. The famine was already being felt in the city. Groaning and lamentations greeted one as one walked from street to street. From every direction one could hear the echo of the sledges, hammers, and axes breaking down the beautiful stone mansions and palaces for material with which to strengthen the



fortifications. Everywhere one could see faces, gaunt with starvation, and some black with the dust of hard toil. Women went about with broken hearts, wailing and weeping. Zion was in the clutches of the enemy, and her children were in misery.

King Hezekiah sent three representatives, Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household; and Shebna, the scribe, and Yoan, the son of Asaph, the recorder, to plead with Rabshakeh for their rights and justice. But Rabshakeh not only refused to listen to them but also spoke insultingly of their good and noble king. He spoke to the people on the walls of Jerusalem and told them they should not put their trust in God, not to listen to their king's commands, for he could not deliver them out of the hands of the mighty Sennacherib.

Hezekiah gathered twelve thousand men, true to their king and their country, also their officers. When they were all equipped on the market-place, King Hezekiah came forth and spoke to them, as follows:

"Listen, my children! The great army of the Assyrians has come and is besieging the city, but do not fret nor let their great numbers weaken your courage. Their strength is only human, but with God's help our armies will conquer them. Gird yourselves with heroism, and carry with you the fear and love of God. Pray to Him and hope for His help. He will give you such wonderful assistance as you have never hoped for. For the City of Zion is not only for her inhabitants but also for all the inhabitants of the land from far and near, and from all the four corners and the distant lands. They all depend upon Zion; in her lap lies the destinies of the nations, and from her goes forth the laws for all peoples. When we conquer, the whole world will rejoice and they will flock from all the corners of the world to the God of Zion. Then you people of Judea will see that your Redeemer is strong. God of Hosts is His name!"

But Shebna put the city into confusion and incited the people one against the other. He had thirteen thousand followers, all of whom were cowards, without honour or without manhood. He placed one of these as leader over this multitude, who spoke these words:

"Who desire life, listen to my advice: Make peace with the King of Assyria before he shall break the city of Jerusalem into pieces. In vain is King Hezekiah seeking means and in vain do those who love Zion tire themselves strengthening their walls. That broken fence is full of cracks and holes. They are committing sins breaking the beautiful mansions and palaces, summer houses and winter residences. That will not strengthen your walls. Can you fix those cracks and holes with old material? The gates of Zion are still locked, but the gates of hell are open for us. If we will not secure some means of safety for ourselves today, we shall be among the dead tomorrow. Rabshakeh will not even accept ransom from us. He warned us once, in the name of the king, to surrender to him. What are our hopes in King Hezekiah? In his treasury? Why, he has not enough to maintain these few soldiers in the time of siege. He emptied the treasures of all the gold and silver, even the gold from the doors of the Temple, and laid them at the feet of King Sennacherib. Do you expect to depend upon our strength? Go up on the walls and look down upon the army of the King of Assyria; they are as numerous as the stars in heaven. All the other nations tremble at the sight of them; all the other nations combined cannot conquer them. Then how can we, a mere handful, expect to do so? They have already taken possession of all the fortified cities in Judea. Our wealthy people immigrated, they flew like birds from their nests. Those who remained, both old and young, are tossing in their beds from hunger, and they who were raised in comfort are fainting in the streets. And many, many tender children were devoured by their starving mothers. There is no wisdom, no strength and no advice against the King of Assyria. Who can stand up against him and conquer him?"

In these turbulent days, Naame and Peninah lived in their beautiful palace. They had fed the poor of the city as long as their provisions lasted, but now there was nothing left them and they became dependent upon Yedidiah for sustenance. Teman and Tamar often visited them. One day Teman visited Naame's home and found Peninah alone, with tears streaming down her lovely cheeks.

"God be with you, noble maiden," said Teman. "Your cheeks

are like the sun and the moon emerging from the heavy clouds, and the tears on your cheeks are like the dewdrops on the sweet scented flowers."

"But I am miserable, my lord," said Peninah.

"Call me not 'my lord,'" said Teman. "I am your servant and you are my mistress, since the day that I first conquered your heart, and I belong to you. Now, through those wicked enemies of yours, a source of life came to you. Your noble birth is now known and your future shines like the rays of the sun when they come from their hiding place."

"Oh, what good is all that to me?" answered Peninah. "I am a noble's daughter, the daughter of Yoram, but where is my father? What has become of him? If he is alive, his spirit is broken, and that is worse than death. And what is the lot of my mother, alone and bereaved? And what is my brother's future? Bitterness and lonely wanderings! And what do you think of my fate—only mourning, tears, and bitter disappointment! How can my countenance shine, when it was clouded on the day of my birth? How can I drink rejoicings from the well of bitterness and tears? Oh, heavily, indeed, did God's hand fall upon my father's house! Where are my hopes? The enemy has surrounded the city and all the daughters of Zion seek protection in the strong arms of their husbands, fathers, and brothers. But where is my father to protect me? Where is my brother, who should save me from the insults of the enemies? Shall I not weep at my lot?"

Teman, who had not taken his eyes from her face while she was speaking, said, "Are you the proclaimed witch? It is true, your lips are bewitching. You are longing for your brother Amnon, who was my brother also. If you but knew how strong our friendship had been from the first, you could realize how painful his departure was to me. Let me be a brother to you in the time of your distress and I will be more than a brother to you in the time of victory. Tell me that you are my sister and I will gird myself with the heroism of a giant. If you only look at me with your loving eyes and encourage me with your sweet words, you will implant strength within me, and I will be the strongest among the strong. If all the Assyrian hosts approach

me, I shall smite them. I will devour them like a destructive lion. And as a lioness fights her enemies when they take her cubs, so will I defend you. I will be a strong fortress and a wall between you and misfortune. The arrows of the Assyrians, flying over my head, will be like drops of rain. Their swords and their bows I will consider as dry straws of a wilted leaf. Tell me, my beloved, that you are my sister and you will strengthen my heart."

"Oh, how can I give you strength when I am helpless myself?" answered Peninah, with a sigh. "What do you want with a girl who is so heavily burdened as I? My tears will melt your heart, and your hands will become weak with my sighs."

"What do I want with you?" repeated Teman. "I want what no other hopes or desires can equal. Behold, the thorns which surround the rose have been burned! Why shall I not reach for the rose? Give back to me, gentle maiden, what you took from me. Give me back my peace and my rest, and God will give you the joy of His helpfulness."

Naame, coming into the room at this moment, said, "You are sad, my children, because of the joys which were taken from you. You should weep for the city, which is in such distress, and for Amnon, who was cast away and has not returned. Therefore, I have once said, 'If God will be favourable to Yoram's house, He will not extinguish his name, and He will bring back Amnon to fulfill the covenant with Yedidiah.' But if God has broken their covenant, and my son Amnon, should not return, your hopes will not be fulfilled and the sapphire will remain removed from the ring. Bear, therefore, God's judgement. Stay away and do not make Peninah's life any more bitter than it is. You are a man; forget your sadness and turn your heart away for a while from my daughter. It may be that God will look down upon your suffering and comfort you, together with the fugitives of Judah."

"All my life depends on Peninah," said Teman. "In her eyes I see the world and all that is in it. If I should have to hide myself from her presence, then my ways will also be hidden from God and the light will be darkness to me. Oh, I am like a man without strength

and my heart is like a woman's, ready to weep and moan! I am like my loving sister Tamar, and like Peninah, the treasure of my heart. We three have loved Amnon and all three of us will bemoan, with bitter tears, the loss of our beloved one, because with him went all our joys." And Teman wept bitterly as he spoke. Peninah also cried, but Naame hid her grief within her. From that day, Teman ceased coming to Naame's house. He joined Tamar in her grief for the loss of her lover, Amnon, the source of their mourning.

## *Chapter twenty-nine*

**L**et us follow Amnon in his wanderings. Disappointed because his mother and sister did not come to meet him that night in Bethlehem, he rode away before the break of day towards Ezikah, and arrived there in the morning. There he joined a party of fugitives on their way to Egypt. As they neared Echron, they met a Philistine attachment, which took them prisoners and sold them to Greeks, who were landing in Echron on the way back to the Island of Kapthar, which was among the islands belonging to Greece. Thither they brought their captives and made them gardeners and vinedressers.

The overseer was a man from Judah, taken captive in the days of Ahaz. He was made overseer over his own people, because he had command of the Greek language besides his mother tongue. The captives worked on a beautiful mountain, which lay on the shore of the sea. The mountain was cultivated with beautiful gardens and vineyards, and the purity of the water around the mountain added to its beauty.

As Amnon looked upon the glorious picture of nature, the recollection of the beautiful City of Zion, which was so dear to him, and the loving hearts which he had left behind, came to his mind. A groan came from the very bottom of his heart when he thought of it. Amnon was like a coconut tree, which had been taken from the fertile land and transplanted in a barren land, whose leaves had wilted and lost their beauty.

Spring came again and the captives came to the gardens to cultivate and dress the vines. Amnon was working in one corner of the garden and his eyes were red with weeping. The overseer, approaching him, said, "Behold, the spring has renewed life to the earth! Why do you not renew your spirits? You are young; why are you so broken down? An old man finds it hard to renew his vigor, even in the springtime, but a young man should take up a new life, full of vigor, with the spring. Wake up, dear lad, and take courage! It seems that all the workers here like you, and I love you myself for two reasons—for your good looks and for your birthplace. They told me that you were born in Zion and for that city I yearn, as my whole life is connected with it."

"Even though I am young," said Amnon, "I have suffered and experienced more hardships and misfortunes than an old man. Now I am separated from the woman whom I love more than my life, and from a tender mother and from a beautiful sister. They snatched me like a bird from its nest and brought me here. A loose bird, nobody cares to comfort me, and I have no one to wipe away my tears. I can only tell my troubles to the wind and my distress to the waves of the sea, which will be carried away like the groanings of my heart. What comfort and vigor can the sweet spring give me? The fresh air does not comfort a man who is tired of life, and the beautiful sunshine cannot comfort a bitter heart. What joy do the flowers of the valley bring to me, when my flower flew away from me like dust? Oh, if I had wings like a pigeon, I would fly to the mountains of Zion and take the beloved of my heart and carry her where the seas end, to a place where there are no tattlers nor mischief-makers! There she would listen to my words and she would see my tears, and believe in them.

And if the walls of Jerusalem have been broken to the ground, and the beloved of my heart is dying among the ruins, then I will go to the ruins of Zion, to the desolate palaces and to the deserted Holy Temple. I will weep over the ruined city, over her victims and over my lost loved one. I shall cry until my heart shall have spent its life and put an end to my misery."

"I feel your misery deep in my heart," said the overseer. "But if you knew the agony of my heart, you would be silent. I belonged to the nobility of the land. I enjoyed my sweet peaceful life in a marble palace. I shone in the light of God. I enjoyed love in its sweetness, and I was happy. My misfortune came suddenly and my future is cut off. It is nineteen long years since my misery began. I became old, bent and grey in strange lands. God cast me to this place, but He was not satisfied with my own misery; His hand was heavy upon my household in Zion. A fire had consumed my home and wife, with two children, and my heart was broken with their misfortune. But a waste is left in my heart at the recollection that my beloved wife was untrue to me. Ten years ago, some fugitive from Judah told me all about it, and since that time I have had no rest in my heart. Why shall I conceal my name from you? You are from Zion, and you surely must have heard the name of General Yoram. Behold him now standing before you in his misery!"

Amnon looked at him and trembled, and started back. His face turned pale, his strength left him, and his heart was breaking with pity for the man who was brought so low, from the height of the mountains to the depths of the sea. He shuddered at the thought that Azrikam, his rival, was the son of this noble man.

"Why did my words startle you so noticeably?" asked Yoram. "A man is born naked. God raises him and brings him down to the dust."

Amnon sighed and answered, "How true were the words of my beloved when she told me, 'What man can see life and death in one moment and survive.' So I see this moment, high and low; therefore, my heart beats within me and my spirit is rebelling. Are you General Yoram, whose name and memory are in everybody's mouth?"

“Do you know Yedidiah?” asked Yoram. “How is he? Do you know my son Azrikam, and my friends, Avicha and Sisry?”

Amnon answered all these questions in the affirmative and he told Yoram the end of Matan, the justice. And when their conversation turned again to Yedidiah, Amnon could not keep back the tears which were streaming down his cheeks. Yoram could not understand the meaning of Amnon’s tears. While they were both standing there weeping, the owner of the garden came and said to Yoram, in the Greek language, “Is it for this I made you overseer, that you should soften the captives’ hearts with memories of their birth and kin?” And in a rough voice, he continued, “I put these people under your supervision and from you I will look for their work.” Thereupon Yoram left Amnon and went to his duties, and Amnon went to his work.

The next morning, Amnon, even though he tossed the whole night in an agony of grief and in a burning fever, awoke as usual and went to work in his garden. It was a cloudy morning and before the day had advanced, a storm arose from the sea. The clouds gathered and darkened skies. Amnon was sitting on top of the mountain, with a lonely heart, and his eyes were raised towards heaven, where a ray of sun was shining from amidst the clouds, and he said to himself, “Thou great light, ruler of the day, thou beautiful light! As a true witness I regarded thee when I made my covenant of love with Tamar. Both of us looked upon you at that time, and by thy light we walked on the Mount of Olives, to rejoice in the hopes our future held for us. Bring me back, oh, thou sun, hope and healing on thy wings! Bring me, with thy glorious light, the sweet words of Tamar! Bring them to me when they are still warm, as soon as she utters them with her sweet lips! Make me hear her voice as she always said, ‘Hope, Amnon, hope is better than life.’ Let thy glorious light shine over God’s city, that my innocence may come to light to my beloved Tamar. Woe is to me! Since Tamar cast me away, God’s countenance also ceased to shine on me. What good is the sun to me? By his light I see only misery. Hide thyself, oh, thou sun! Hide thyself beneath the clouds, as my hopes are hidden in the darkness! Cease to shine upon the earth, as Tamar has ceased to shine upon me. Let the day be darkened

without thy light. Let not the moon and stars shine. Let everything be extinguished as my life is extinguished. Let the light-giving bodies fall from their heavenly sphere like the leaves in the forest. Let brimstone fall from heaven upon the earth. Let there be no peace on earth, let there be no rejoicing and no gladness. Let love turn to hatred, prayer to blasphemy, charity to selfishness; and let the world of rejoicing be turned to a world of sorrow. Let the revengeful God cause the fire to burn even its waters, and let the waters to overflow the land. And let the heavens give war to the earth, let the earth rise with fury over all her inhabitants. And let there be a waste in heaven and a desert on the earth below. God Himself has rebelled against me! The pillars of the earth are shaking. What is the foundation of the earth? Zion! And who are the pillars? Jerusalem! Tremble, thou earth! Thy towers have fallen in the day of the rush of war! Shake, oh ye heavens! Your pillars are removed from beneath the dwelling of God! The light of the world is enshrouded in darkness and so is God’s city, and her inhabitants walk the streets like shadows. They can only be seen by the flash of their swords and their muskets. Oh, how fearful is that terrible slaughter! The Assyrians and Uhlans have broken the walls and passed through the gates of Zion! They trampled the people under their feet, and they have slaughtered the innocent children! And the glory of Judah has been brought to the dust, and her lamentations ascend to the heavens. The moon has turned to the colour of blood, and the waters surrounding Jerusalem are red with the blood of their people. Oh, what a fearful sight! A sight of perpetual waste! Oh, the city of my cradle, the enemy has destroyed you! He destroyed the righteous with the wicked. The revengeful God has given the lash into the Assyrian’s hands, and they have lashed God’s people unmercifully. Like an epidemic which does not distinguish the wicked from the righteous, so all the inhabitants of Zion are swept away before the enemy!”

All this time Yoram had been standing behind Amnon, but he did not have the heart to disturb him. Amnon continued, “Woe is to me! Where are you, mother, sister? Where did I leave you? Go not to the valley of Tophet; that is the valley of the dead. The stabbed,

the murdered are thrown like the dung upon the earth. Come, let us go to the Mountain of God, and let us pour out our hearts on the broken altar of God. Hasten, before you fall by the enemy's sword. Stop your roaring, ye waters! I hear a wail coming from Zion—a voice from those dying in agony on the Mount of Olives! It looks as though the Mount of Olives itself were destroyed. Woe is to me! Alas, my very life, my love, dwells there! Let me hear your voice, Tamar, my only Tamar!" (And he was silent for a moment, as though listening to a voice.)

"Woe is to me! There is no answer. You are ending your life among the other victims. As I call you, you lie immersed in your own blood, and your brother Teman lies beside you; his last drops of blood are flowing. A shame upon thee, oh sun! How can you dare shine upon such outrages! Come, mother, sister, let us fall among these victims and let us mingle our blood with these sweet tender ones. Life has separated us, and death will unite us!"

Amnon could not speak any more, and, exhausted, he fainted, and fell upon the grass where he had been sitting. With trembling hands, Yoram raised him and said, "My heart cries for you, poor lad. Your mind is wandering and you talk about visions and fearful dreams. Come, I will put you to rest. You have a high fever. Your mind tosses like the sea, and your brow burns like fire. Oh, you handsome, noble flower! Cursed may they be who cut you off from the earth wherein you were planted." And Yoram took him in his arms and carried him to the tent, which was in the garden, and laid him on the bed. When Amnon revived and saw Yoram standing by his bedside, he said, "Oh, have mercy upon me, my lord. I am very miserable."

"Be quiet, my dear lad," said Yoram. "I will take care of you just as though you were my own son, and will nurse you in your sickness."

## *Chapter thirty*

**T**amar, also, could not reconcile herself to her grief; she wept continually. It was on the fourteenth day of the first month of spring, when Sisry came to Yedidiah's house as usual, to be one counted on the Passover lamb. He found Tamar lamenting and bemoaning her lot, and he said to her, "The misfortune which has befallen the city is fearful. The lamentations have spread over the whole land of Judah. It was better that you bemoan the inhabitants of Zion in their distress rather than Amnon, who is in a place of safety, even though it is a strange land."

Tamar wept bitterly and answered, "I will cry forever for him, who has gone from me, never to return."

Yedidiah, who was present, said, "Why do you bemoan the dead? They who dwell in the dust will never come back to us—we will go to them. Weep over the living, whose lives are in danger, but not for the dead."

"Yes, Amnon is dead," said Yedidiah. "He fell at the hands of the Assyrians. A fugitive came back yesterday from the heights of Saul

and told us the following: 'I saw the wealthy people of Jerusalem, who went to seek their safety in strange lands, disarmed and bound in chains, and among them was a young man of good countenance, with raven locks and a forehead as white as snow, who fell at the sword, fighting for liberty.' I am positive that according to description, the youth was Amnon. Not he alone fell, but many others were destroyed by the sword of the Assyrians. Why do you weep for one, daughter? Forget him who sleeps in his grave. He will never return to you."

"Perhaps the fugitive saw another youth answering that description," said Sisry, "but at any rate, cease your weeping, for if Amnon is dead, crying will not bring him back to life. And on the other hand, if the fugitive was mistaken, then he still lives, and there is hope that he will return after peace is restored. Therefore, dry your eyes, put your trust in the Lord and forget Amnon during these troublous days."

"No," said Tamar, "I will never forget Amnon—not in time of war and disturbance nor in the time of redemption and song. I will not forget him while awake or sleep. Woe is to me! I am broken down by the awful visions I see when I sleep. And the dreams are not idle omens. Listen and I will tell you: I retired with a broken heart last night and so I fell asleep. In my dreams I saw the king, with his sword girded at his side, at the head of his army, which was still true to their God and their king, standing on the outskirts of the east side, ready for an attack. Then they formed a circle around him to listen to his words, and King Hezekiah's eyes were full of tears and he raised them to heaven and said, 'Oh, God, look down from Thy heavens and see the King of Judah leaving his throne and his city to fight, with a handful of soldiers, against the King of Assyrians, whose army is more numerous than the stars of heaven! To Thee, I leave this great city, her women, her sucklings, her aged, her widows and her orphans. Shield them, oh God, under Thy wings. Be Thou the shepherd over these poor lost sheep. Remember Thy covenant with us. Do not extinguish the heirship to the crown of David. Shield us in Thy peaceful tents.' The soldiers and officers wept as the King spoke, and with touching voices they bade farewell to God's city, to God's dwellings and to their wives and children, who came to see

them depart. From among this great army, Amnon came forth with lustrous eyes, with his sword girded to his side, with a shield and spear in his hands, mounted on his noble charger, with the lion's skin under his saddle. He looked like a knight in his glory in the time of war, and he called to me, saying, 'Farewell, farewell, Tamar, my only beloved! Even death cannot separate us!' As he spoke these words, he disappeared and I was riveted to the place, as if fastened with nails. I could not move I was so astounded. I wanted to speak, but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. I attempted to scream, but no sound issued from my lips. And not until the army turned and began to march did my tongue become loosened. Then I raised my voice and called, 'Oh, lover of my heart, lord of my youth, where art thou going? Why do you break the command of God? You are betrothed to me and are going to battle ere you have taken me! You are allowed by law to remain a year in your house, to establish it before going to battle.' And I was following the army farther and farther, lamenting and calling, 'Amnon, Amnon!' I raised my voice, I cried, I shrieked, but nobody heard me. I walked until I came to the last gate. I wanted to pass through the gate but the sentinels stopped me. I turned and joined the other women from Zion, who were gathered there, weeping and crying, with their hands clasping their heads. Then we all went up on the walls of the city and from there we went to the tower, where we could see the battlefield. As I saw the Assyrian army, I was astounded, and my flesh began to creep from the noise and roar of the army. I was standing and gazing at the standard of the army of Judah, which was moving with difficulty. Like a hailstorm the spears and javelins descended upon the warriors. Arrows were flying on the wings of death. The war fell very heavily upon our people and their dead were strewn all over the battlefield. Suddenly a voice from amidst the conquerors and a blast of trumpets was heard from the Assyrian army, proclaiming, 'The King of Judah has been taken alive!' And the army of Judah, hearing these words, turned their backs and retreated in disorder. Like a frightened herd of sheep they ran, falling one upon the other, with the Assyrians in hot pursuit, like hungry wolves. Then I heard the roar of the Assyrian commanders,

howling like leopards, 'Wake up! Wake up, children of Assyria and Uhlau! Go up to the mountains of Zion and destroy the city to the ground! Kill, destroy, with fire and sword!' And in that great tumult and fearful disaster, I saw Amnon being trod upon at the very gates of Zion, and I heard his voice in his death agonies. I wanted to jump down from the tower and thus end my life together with him. Then I awoke, and it was only a dream. The fearful vision creeps through my frame yet. My spirit is like a waste from that awful night. Why, I am not the only one in the world! There are many misfortunes which we must endure from the hands of God. But there are some supernatural occurrences which God has chosen for me. From the first day I knew Amnon, our joy and our grief were peculiar and extraordinary. No, father, mother and all my friends, do not attempt to comfort me. I will never forget Amnon, neither in time of war and disturbance nor in the time of redemption and song. Neither when awake nor when asleep, will I forget him!"

"If the dream," answered Sisry, "sounds strange to you, to me it does not. Dreams come from things we think of and see during the day. And as we are in constant dread of the outbreak of war and fear its issue, so Tamar, taking all these things to heart, sees them in her dreams. And now, since she has heard the sad tidings concerning Amnon, it will add to her grief and make her dreams only more realistic. But there is no significance in that dream."

"I see it from the same light," said Teman. "We hear nothing but sighing and prayers from the Temple of God, and the Levites are blowing the trumpets ever since the enemy besieged the city, and our hearts and thoughts are so full of fright and uncertainty that we dream dreams even more fearful than the reality."

"What will be our end?" asked Hananeel.  
 "There are hopes," answered Sisry. "Listen and I will repeat to you what the prophet, son of Amos, said in his holiness: 'With fire will God judge, and with the breath of his nostrils He will set the whole army of the Assyrians on fire. A storm and a flame of fire will destroy everything around them. The flash of a sword will not be seen, nor will there be heard a clash of the spears. At God's hands the

Assyrians will tremble and they will be astounded by His voice. The sinners and the wicked will perish by His words, and the righteous will find safety and shelter until God's anger shall pass away. Zion's suffering will begin in the night, but ere another morning shall have dawned, with God's help, their sufferings shall cease. And through His help, we shall know which is His favourite nation. Then they who shall be left in Jerusalem shall be called holy."

The Assyrian armies had lain down to rest, feeling secure, as a lion might feel in the midst of a herd of sheep. For who could disturb their rest? Like a ball of fire, the sun sank in the heavens. The night, with its fearful darkness came, and the moon as red as blood shone over the Mount of Olives. It was the night of the celebration of the Passover—that memorable time when the nation commemorated the wonderful assistance which God gave in the land of Egypt. But, alas, that joyful evening had turned into a night of anxiety. The handful of people left in Zion, deprived of the holiday rejoicings, came to their homes, weeping silently and praying that God might turn His anger from them. The priests, like lost sheep, moved in the Temple, between the entrance and the altar, weeping and lamenting. The king had taken off his crown and covered himself with sackcloth, and the son of Amos was pouring out his prayers before God, praying, "Look down, oh God, upon Zion, the city of our assemblies! How joyful and holiday-like it used to be! And now her streets are full of lamentations, her mountains are deserted. Look down, oh God, upon Zion, the city of our assemblies! Fear is over all. Instead of the rush of holiday feasters, we hear the roar of the enemy. Instead of the voices of the singers and merry-makers, which were wont to ascend to the Holy Temple, we hear the trumpets of the besiegers. Instead of wine which we drank with Thy blessing, we now drink tears. Wake up, Thou Almighty God! Favour those who depend upon Thy help, and bring to account our enemies! Oh, the strength of Jacob, come down from thy throne and show thy strength, as thou didst of old in Egypt, and Thy helping hand at the Red Sea!"

How fearful is God when He sits in judgement and how



glorious and strong is He when girded with revenge—the Creator of great deeds! With His words, He changes the order of things. The heavens and earth will leave their places, the planets will change their stations, the elements will act against each other, the ice mountains will melt with one word from His mouth. When the God of judgment rode with mercy in His chariot to redeem His children, the waters stood up like a wall before Him. He roared at them and they buried the Egyptians beneath the seas.

Now, at that time, He came in a storm in His chariot and He roared through a flame of fire. With His seraphs beside Him, He passed over the Assyrian armies. A tremendous storm enveloped them, and the seraphs with their wings, fanned the flames of the raging fire. As they passed the sleeping army, they left behind them a quiet, fearful silence and a deadly slumber. God's anger lasted only a second, and in that time the Assyrians were consumed by an invisible fire. And as the morning star arose with good tidings, uncovering God's secret hidden in the darkness of the night, the rulers of the day and night, the sun and moon, were still vying with each other to be the bearer of the good tidings.

The sentinels on the wall were waiting to hear the usual movements of the enemy in their tents, but not a sound reached them. Surprised, they listened more attentively, and still everything remained as quiet as the night. Then they raised their voices in song on heights of Zion, singing, "Awake with the light, God's city! Thine enemy is asleep! Sing and rejoice! Thine enemies are dumb. God's right hand has done wonders, as in the days of old. He broke down the strength of our enemies, He turned the night upon them and turned them to dust. Oh, ye daughters of Zion, put on your mantles of strength, for thine enemies are clothed in shame! Thine oppressors are no more. Celebrate, Judah, thy festival!"

The night with its fears had passed. The sun shone forth and enveloped the City of David in a glorious brightness, and brought on its wings a healing to the hearts of the inhabitants. The sick left their beds of suffering, and those who were suffering from hunger, left their poverty stricken huts; the cripples laid aside their sticks, the

lame forgot their lameness and danced about for joy, and the weak girded themselves with strength. Everybody living went out to the tents of the Assyrians. All the valleys, which yesterday were filled with chariots and horsemen, today were filled with dead. Everybody then gathered as much spoils as he could carry away.

God's city, which was in deep mourning, became a city of great rejoicing. God had recreated Jerusalem. From all the corners were heard rejoicings and gladness. The celebration of the holiday was mingled with prayers and thanksgiving on the Holy Mountain. Rejoicing was everywhere! The misery was soon forgotten and there were no more sad faces.

Tamar also went to God's Mountain with Naame and Peninah, and, falling on her knees, prayed, "Oh, God, creator of wonders, let our dead return to life and rejoice with us!"

"Send us also consolation," said Naame and Peninah. "Console us, oh God, as Thou hast consoled Zion and its mournings."

Tirzah joined them and said, "Zion has recovered from its sickness. God is good to them who put their trust in Him. Let us hope that He will return Amnon to us."

King Hezekiah had ordered all the captives who had returned from Egypt and those from Ethiopia, whom the King of Assyria had brought with him, to assemble before the gates of Jerusalem, and spoke to them as follows: "Now, God has taken the yoke of the Assyrians from your neck. He has loosened the chains of your captivity. For the revenge of Zion, the God of Hosts has destroyed the Assyrians like flax before a fire. But this is not the time to speak of the works of God, when we can see them with our own eyes. The heavens and the earth are rejoicing and singing. Generations to come will hear and rejoice over this which we see before us. Look, ye captives, and wonder! Look at the dead Assyrians and Uhlans, like dung on Judah's soil! What has become of ye, destroyers of nations? Like a night robber ye came, and like a thief ye sneaked away at night. Ye could not withstand God's light and His righteous deeds. Ye have spread over the whole world. Ye have conquered nations and destroyed them, and also the idols of Carchemish, Chanla, Chmash, and Arpod. Ye

cut down the throne of their kings to their dust, but ye did not cease there—ye were not satisfied. Ye raised thine hand against the daughter of Zion. Ye came with thy knights, commanders and allies from other kingdoms, and, like an eagle, ye soared from afar to the house of God. Ye did not rest, ye did not sleep, but now, from the voice of the God of Jacob, ye fell into a deep slumber; ye were tired. Now ye will rest upon Judah's soil in an everlasting rest. Now, ye captives of nations, ye have seen and ye will relate God's wonder to the distant islands that the God of Jacob hath wrought wonders!

"Your God is the only God," answered the captives. "Greatness and strength are His. Glory and honour are in His Temple! His name is great! He shields the righteous!"

The captives, when freed by Hezekiah, spread the news of the fall of the Assyrians in the miraculous manner, far and wide. In the furthest islands they related God's great power and mercy, and from the corners of the earth could be heard rejoicings and thanksgiving to the God of Zion for His revenge on the King of Assyria. Day after day, gifts and congratulations poured in from other nations to King Hezekiah. The people of Zur also sent presents and returned the captives and fugitives of Judah as a gift to the King. Whoever applied for liberty in the name of Israel was immediately given his freedom for the sake of the God of Jacob.

The traveling merchant, whom we have before mentioned, whose business lay between Zur and Zidon, was one of the representatives who brought the greetings and gifts to King Hezekiah. Being in Jerusalem, he visited Yedidiah's house. He was cordially greeted and made welcome by all, for the helping hand he once offered Amnon. When he asked for Amnon, Tamar told him the sad story. He was surprised and sympathized with her over the misfortune that had befallen Amnon. Then the merchant said, "I have just made my voyage by sea, and I met many vessels and ships. They were all speeding towards Jerusalem, carrying the captured Israelites back to their homes. There are no storms in these days but a calm, peaceful wind blows, bringing the captives, with songs, back to Jerusalem. I am going back to my country now, but I am determined to make my

business trip to the islands of Greece, and from there to Tarshish. I will not let my business engross me so entirely this time, but I will value the man of Judah higher than gold, and I will look for her captives as we search for treasures. And if God will favour me with the opportunity to meet Amnon, be assured that I will bring him to you as a present—not in any expectation of reward, but from sheer love of Amnon. He is very dear to me."

Tamar wiped the tears from her cheeks and said, "So may thy life be dear in God's eyes, and may He lead your steps to the place where Amnon is. May you bring him back from there, as you brought him back from Nineveh. Your heart will rejoice to see all of us around you, blessing your name for the good you have showered upon us. And our blessing will rest upon you and will remain with you to the end of your days."

"I will do all in my power," said the merchant. "Pray to your God that He should favour my journey and its purpose, because God is favouring these days, and showers His blessings and peace upon the inhabitants of Zion, so may He favour me."

Then they wished him Godspeed and gave him several presents, and he departed and left the same day.

## *Chapter thirty-one*

**T**wo months had passed since the fall of Sennacherib's army, and Tamar's hopes for Amnon were lessening day by day; but her grief and loneliness were increasing. Teman also, seeing that his hopes for Peninah were in vain, could not endure to be so near his love and yet so far from her as the other end of the world, so he left Zion and stayed with Sisry, in Carmel.

Tamar, all this time, lived in her summer home. She had a new maid, whose name was Peoh, a very bright girl. Yedidiah's purpose in giving Peoh to Tamar as a companion was that she might persuade Tamar to console herself and forget Amnon. One day Peoh endeavored to brighten her mistress by suggesting that she choose one of her many wooers in place of Amnon.

"Try not to console me, Peoh," said Tamar. "Throw not away your words of consolation on me, because they are in vain. 'The only one, thou art to me,' my lover said to me. Since then he is the only one to me. There is no one else on the face of the earth for me;

so in vain do you try to comfort me. Thy words are like oil on my burning love."

The summer passed, but Tamar's grief had not ceased. The month of strengthening (the beginning of autumn) had come, but Tamar's spirit had not strengthened. The poor lonely girl walked in the garden and stopped at every place where she was wont to sit and enjoy her loving chats with her lover, Amnon. All these memories increased the wounds in her already aching heart. Oftentimes she saw Amnon in her dreams, and the following day she was tortured with the visions of the previous night. At other times she would not sleep at all. Her thoughts wandered in the darkness of the night and brought her imaginings that Amnon's voice was calling her among the olive trees. Then with a joyful voice she would awaken Peoh, saying, "Oh, I hear my lover's voice in the garden!"

Then Peoh, listening, would answer, "I hear no voice." After that, Peoh ceased to answer her mistress when she came to her with such dreams.

On the fifth day of that month, Tamar, looking for some papers in her father's room, chanced upon one addressed to her. Thinking that it had been mislaid, she took the paper, and recognizing Amnon's writing, she went into the garden, where she would not be disturbed, to read it. Thus it ran:

*Thou fields of Bethlehem, where my youth was spent,  
Here fell the lion by my strength and art,  
Here thoughts of friendship, love and murder dwell,  
Here love blossomed like a flower in my heart;  
My heart was sore disturbed, my spirit all aglow,  
For love for all eternity o'erwhelmed me so.*

*Thou, Tamar, hast enthralled me with thy love,  
With kindness hast enticed me near to thee,  
Within thy palace offered me a home,  
And with thy loving eyes enchanted me;*

*Thou, hopeful, prophesied for me a future great,  
Alas! 'Twas false, for on our love grim sorrows wait.*

*My every thought turned but around thy lodge,  
My heart was thine, mine eyes thy dear ones sought,  
The treasures of the world I found in thee,  
And thou my happy lot in life. I thought,  
But hast, like the swiftly running waters I,  
And all my hopes, like winged birds before me, fly.*

*Great wonders blessed the morning of my youth,  
But enemies unknown have suffering brought;  
They turned thy love, oh, Tamar, into hate,  
My heart is broken and my ruin wrought.  
My nights of joy, unkindness to sorrow turn,  
Because, dear love, thou all my fond devotions spurn.*

*Instead of abiding peace, affliction came,  
And swept my life with scorching, fiery breath.  
Have I but sinned in seeking thee, my love?  
Have I blasphemed that thus I meet my death?  
My fond rejoicings all to deepest mourning turn,  
For Tamar's thoughts with unforgetting hatreds burn.*

*Above me shakes the mighty vault of heaven,  
The shining stars from me their bright lamps hide,  
Alone in darkness, desolate, I roam,  
And think of thee amid misfortunes wide.  
What if from hunger here alone, forgot, I perish,  
If thou no longer care our precious love to cherish?*

*Tears now on right and left encompass me,  
All joys and brightness in my life are dead;  
And where for safety shall thy lover fly,  
When earth's foundations shake with terror dread?*

*At every trembling step some unseen trap is laid  
By cruel beast and man, and I am sore afraid.*

*Forgetfulness alone will bring me rest,  
There equal peasant stands with princess fair.  
My grave, oh love, shall be my wedding couch,  
And wicked hands will not disturb me there.  
The Assyrian sword will not intrude upon my sleep,  
The earth's strong armour will protect my slumber deep.*

"That is enough, oh, God!" exclaimed Tamar, raising her eyes towards heaven. "I have mourned and cried enough in thy rejoicing city. Thou hast taken Amnon's life! Take mine also, and then will end all the mourning in thy city. How can I live, hearing Amnon's lamentations poured out in this letter! These were his last words, when his life departed from him. Oh, how fearful is that vision to me! It is breaking my heart! How beautiful wert thou, oh Zion, when Amnon graced thee with his beauty! What art thou now to me? Nothing but a valley of death; and I, like an owl, raising my screeching voice to sadden all the joy in this city and tire God and man. But there is one hope for me, and that is that I shall not last long after Amnon. His love was deep-rooted in my heart when he was alive, and now, when he is no more, his love blooms in my heart and with me it will die. But I wish I could end my poor life on the same ground which opened her mouth to swallow Amnon's blood."

Tamar's father, being in the garden, heard her. He approached her and said, "According to the law, a month is given to mourn for the death of a betrothed. You are mourning perpetually and are embittering your parents' lives."

"Why did you hide Amnon's letter from me?" asked Tamar. "Had I read that letter before, my life would have ended long ago, and you would not have to endure my grief so long."

Then her father tried to console her once more, and said, "Our Father, Jacob, considered his son Joseph, among the dead, and after many years he found him, and he was the source of life to his

father and brothers. Hope, therefore, to God, my daughter. Nothing is impossible for Him."

"Woe is to me!" answered Tamar. "How can I have strength enough to hope? What is my end? Try not to console me, father—all the consolation is hidden from my sight. Let me cry and let me die in misery. Let death be my consolation."

## Chapter thirty-two

*“The voice of my beloved!  
Behold! He cometh leaping upon the mountains,  
skipping upon the hills.”*

The Song of Songs 11:8

**I**t was Yedidiah’s custom every year, after the fruit and grapes were gathered, to invite to his summer home all his friends, and give a large feast on the thirteenth day of Tishrei. After this feast, it was his custom to lock up the summer house, which was left closed until the next spring. He remained then seven days in the Succa and returned to his winter palace in Jerusalem.

This year being the seventh year, the Sabbath of the land, there was no harvest, and all the inhabitants of Judah are that which grew of its own accord. Even this year, Yedidiah did not change his custom, and made a fat feast for his friends on the usual day. And he said to his wife, “There will be great rejoicings in our city this year. There will be a very large crowd from far and near to rejoice in the Feast of the Tabernacles. But in our house, alas, there is no happiness! Let us, therefore, invite the young men and women, all the beauties and the young lords from Zion, and also the visiting young folks. Let us have music, dancing, and singing. Maybe it will enliven

Tamar and she may raise her eyes to some handsome nobleman and forget Amnon."

Tirzah shook her head and said, "That is just as you men all talk, but you shall know, my beloved, that women are not like men. Man looks at many women and loves them all. But the woman—if she chooses one and loves him, and if that one is lost to her, she will never forget him. But with all that, let us try your suggestion, and we may succeed."

On the thirteenth day of this month, at noon, a large crowd had already gathered in Yedidiah's house. Teman returned from Carmel and brought Sisry with him. The old man, Avicha, also arrived from Bethlehem, and many outsiders, young men and women, were present. Naame and Peninah also came. There was singing and dancing, laughing and music, but the merriment was not complete; it was mingled with sadness, even with tears. Teman and Peninah, looking at each other, hung their heads in sadness, and were silent. And Tamar, unable to take part in all the rejoicing, went to her room and cried bitterly. Her friends from Zion, and those visiting in Zion from the neighbouring cities, tried their best to comfort her, but all their efforts were in vain. Tamar could not be comforted. Teman and Peninah could not restrain their tears, and Naame and Tirzah wept too.

The guests remained until late in the evening and they related all the hardships and misfortunes they had endured at the hands of the Assyrian army, and then thanked God for His wonderful help and mercy. When they saw that the rejoicings in Yedidiah's house were not as whole-hearted this year as usual, they left for their homes.

Naame and Peninah were detained and invited to remain. Sisry and Avicha also stayed overnight, so that they might be ready early in the morning to cut the boughs of the thick trees and the willows of the brook, which were to be used for the coming festival, according to the Law. Tamar's maid, Peoh, drank a little too much wine that evening, and, feeling encouraged to talk to her mistress more freely than was her privilege, said, "Why do you mourn more than Peninah and Teman do? Their grief is just as strong as yours. Even

Naame, the mother of Amnon and Peninah, composes herself. Why do not you do likewise?"

"You see," said Tamar, "Naame had two children—she rejoices with the other after the loss of one. But I had only one whom I loved, and that one is no more. Peninah can also rejoice when her lover shall return from his studies in Carmel; but where is my lost one, that I should hope for joy? The gates of Zion are open day and night for the captives and the lost ones of Judah who are returning from all the corners of the world, from over the lakes of Kush, from the north and the west; but the earth has closed her gates over Amnon, so that he cannot come out again from her bonds. Let all the other hearts rejoice and all the spirits be glad, but my heart is forgotten and my spirit is cast from my lover. He is no more!"

So Tamar spent her nights in bitter yearnings. When all the others in her father's house were sleeping, she alone was awake.

The sons of Zion, the pious ones, who are obedient to God's law, were awake early this morning, even before the morning star arose in the heavens. They scattered themselves among the palms and in the valleys and on the banks of the brooks, and in small groups were standing, busily engaged cutting boughs off the goodly trees—branches of palm trees, boughs of thick trees and willows of the brook, to be used as memorial of God's helpfulness and His strength, and for rejoicing and thanksgiving on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

The evening stars were dim in comparison with the bright light of the morning star, which shone with reflection of greenish gold on the green hilltops. From the east, the sun was rising like a small flame and gradually increasing until it shone in its full glory as it came from its abode. The streams and the rivers lay quiet and looked like sheets of silver and like a mirror, reflecting a greenish red colour, the green being reflected from the surrounding mountains and the red from the glowing sun. Also the changeable colours of the sky, pale blue, and the stars, like silver dots in the heavens, increased the beauty of the scene on this glorious morning. The eagle awoke his young, and all the winged creatures began their warbling. All nature was awake

and in harmony sang and praised God for His gifts, and from the mountains of Zion were heard the songs to the God of Hosts.

Yedidiah also arose early this morning and went to God's Temple, and Teman and Sisry went to cut boughs off the thick trees and the willows of the brook. The whole household was awake, but Tamar, who, tired with crying the whole night, was still in bed, restlessly sleeping. She slept, but her heart was awake. Her eyes were closed, but she heard every word and every move around her. The dreams created fearful and confused visions without any connection, without any meaning, and in her dozing she heard a sweet voice buzzing in her ears, a sweet voice coming from the olive trees which stand near the summer house, crying, "How beautiful and pleasant are these shady branches and twigs, covered with the dewdrops of heaven, which are shaken by the wings of the awakening birds and drop on the heads of the righteous, even on the head of the son of Amos, who passes here every morning to teach the people the ways of righteousness! How inviting are thy dwellings, oh, Zion! Thy heights are girded with joy! Peace in thy house! Song and rejoicing in thy palaces! The unrighteous enemy has disturbed thy peace but it did not last long. The anxiety has passed away, and quiet and peace have taken their place, and like a sleeping rose thou art awakening from thy slumber. Thy peace and comfort will increase still more; thou wilt continue to bloom; thy children will grow up peaceful and will awake with praises of God on their lips. Oh, how peaceful is everything! Here a father is relating to his children God's righteousness and His wonder which He showed to His people! And the children, rejoicing, listen attentively. There a mother, embracing her young one in peace and security, kisses him, and on her tongue is a blessing to God. Here again is a fiancé, rejoicing with his betrothed that the time of mourning and anxiety has passed away from Zion, and their hearts are happy with twofold pleasure. And there, early risers are swarming, with contented hearts, to the House of God, to sing His praises. The morning stars are also singing. 'Behold! I hear a voice from the Temple, the voice of God calling to the city, and the echo is heard

in all the corners of the world! Hush, all flesh! Ye birds, be still and listen to the song coming from the Holy Temple!"  
And the voices and the blasts of the trumpets and the thrill of the singers were heard singing these words:

*Jerusalem, our fortress strong,*

*The city where our feasts shall be,*

*Great Zion, choice of heaven's hosts,*

*Our hopes are centered all in thee.*

*Your walls and buttresses are strong,*

*Defended by God's watchful care,*

*The city where King David dwelt,*

*And Ariel, Lion of God, was there.*

*Thou mother city, beauty's crown,*

*The king and all his hosts are there*

*Your nation, faultless, stands alone,*

*While peace is in your dwellings fair.*

*Mount Olive in her glory towers,*

*Her stately trees with fruit are fair,*

*And Zion gleaming from the west,*

*With life deep throbbing everywhere.*

*On Mount Moriah's regal dome,*

*The cherubim God's glory keep,*

*Its rays illuminate Zion's homes,*

*While Assyria groves in darkness deep.*

*The nations will to Zion bow,*

*Our mother city, firmly made,*

*God's city with her dwellers true,*

*And God will keep her unafraid.*



Tamar awoke, and calling Peoh, said, "Wake up, Peoh! I have heard a sweet voice, the voice of my lover, talking ever so sweetly, but he has just ceased!"

And Peoh, who was still under the influence of the wine she drank the previous evening, would not get up. "Leave the tited one alone," she said. "There are no words and no voice. It is only a dream."

Tamar sighed and said, "Maybe I do dream again. I am so accustomed to that particular dream." She lay still for a while and she heard the same voice again, saying, "Behold, the voice from heaven like the songs of God. Her captives have returned like pigeons to their homes. Every betrothed claims his bride. But where is my bride? Where is the love of my heart? My beloved was given to another, and to me is given a broken heart and an eternal mourning. Oh, Zion, Zion, heaven is my witness! I have suffered with you, I have drained the cup of bitterness to the dregs with you! Why shall I not drink on your mountains from the cup of your deliverance? Like a stranger, like an outcast, I was driven from thy gates, and your misfortune and your tears have reached me even on the far islands. Take me back now to your home. My heart, which is full of bitterness, is yearning for you. I have carried my bitterness from the strange lands to pour it out on your holy ground. Oh, here is that pleasant olive tree, on which both my name and Tamar's are carved! The morning dew is still nestling on its branches, but the dew of my youth has been dried up. I am like a withered leaf, shattered and blown by the storm from one end of the land to the other. There is my palace and there are the trees under whose shade I was wont to spend many happy days. Now Azrikam is enjoying his honeymoon with Tamar, and I, oh, my heart, I will pour it out here under this olive tree, which shall be a tombstone for them who wish to remember me!"

He could not speak any more. He stood as if dumb, without moving a muscle. And Tamar, who was not sleeping, listened to all his words, and then loudly exclaimed, "No! No! I am not dreaming any more! My tears are streaming down my cheeks and my heart beats violently! Then I must be awake!" So she hastily arose and dressed her-

self. And when she touched the door-knob with her trembling hand, it would not yield, and she saw that the key was not in the door. She shook Peoh roughly and said, "Get up, Peoh, and give me the key! When I look for my lover, he may be gone! Hasten! My heart almost jumped from within me when I heard his voice!"

Peoh, rubbing her eyes, got up and said, "You must excuse me, my lady, but you will make the whole house insane with your dreams. What is it that you have frightened me so?"

"Oh, woman without heart," cried Tamar, "give me the key. This place is suffocating me!"

Peoh opened the door, and Tamar hurried out into the garden. She ran from one corner to the other, but her lover was nowhere to be seen. She walked on, calling, "Amnon! Amnon!" And she clasped her hands, and said, "Did I really dream again, even when I was awake?"

At that instant, the traveling merchant approached her and said, "Go thither, among the olive trees, and there you will find that which you seek. And you will see even that which you never expected to see. But do not tell anything to anybody. I was his redeemer and I want to be the one to bring the glad tidings."

Tamar ran like a deer to the place where she was directed, and the traveller went into Yedidiah's house.

"Amnon," called Tamar as she approached him. "Amnon, my light and my salvation, in the land of the living!" And she fell into his arms.

"Are you still my own little one, my love, my dove?" said Amnon.

They were both speechless with joy and they stood like statues in each other's embrace. Tamar was the first to break the silence, and said, "The heavens have proclaimed thy righteousness, and the earth has testified thy innocence. I am ashamed of myself. I was like a foolish pigeon to believe all the false accusations against thee. I have erred for a short while, and many a day I washed my faults with bitter tears. I wronged Amnon, the shepherd, and the Lord Yoram's son will forgive me."

Amnon, not grasping Tamar's meaning, said, "Leave me, Tamar! Leave Amnon, the shepherd, and go to Yoram's son, if he loves you still. Turn your eyes away from me. Why shall you see my life end before you?"

"No, lord of Judah, and lord of my youth, my heart is bound to thine. Raise thine eyes to thy beloved Tamar, who cannot live any longer without thee! In an unrighteous way, Azrikam enriched himself. He wished to swallow thy father Yoram's inheritance. He was only Nabal, the son of the miserable Uchon. But they all ended their lives in a shameful death. Also Zimri, Hopher, and Bukkiah are in their graves, and thou, my beloved Amnon, son of Yoram, will see happiness with me!"

While Amnon stood there, unable to speak from wonder, Yedidiah, Tirzah, Hananeel, Naame and Peninah, also Teman, Avicha, and Sisry came hurrying to the olive trees. Everyone embraced Amnon, with tears of joy in their eyes.

"My dear son," exclaimed Naame.

"Oh, my brother!" Peninah and Teman exclaimed together.

"Here is the joy of our hearts," said Yedidiah to Tirzah. "Here is our friend Yoram's son. God has returned you to us to heal all wounds, to remove all the bandages and to wipe away the tears from our faces."

"Oh, my releaser and my heir!" called Hananeel. "I can die in peace now; my dream has come true! Not one word failed!"

"Yes," said Amnon, with beating heart, "your dream did come true, but I am dreaming now. I cannot believe myself whether I see aright or whether I am still dreaming."

"Look around, Yoram's son," said Sisry, "and see all these surrounding you, who love you. Awake your love for your beloved Tamar! Think only of her, and no more of those false visions. All your enemies have perished in shame and disgrace, and you have risen from the dust, and with honour your name and birth have risen."

As Sisry was speaking, the traveling merchant and Yoram came out from among the olive trees. Yoram did not yet know that Amnon

was his son, and neither Naame and her daughter, nor Yedidiah and his household, knew of Yoram's return. The traveling merchant kept the news unrevealed, because he wished to be the means of bringing the families together. And as they approached, Yoram went to Yedidiah, and embracing him, exclaimed, "Yedidiah, my friend and my true comrade!"

Yedidiah did not recognize him at first, and asked, "Who are you? You must know me, if you call me by name."

Then Yoram took his ring from his finger, and said, "Do you remember what you told me many years ago? You said that nothing could be compared with friendship, and that the remembrance of it is very dear to true friends. For twenty long years this ring did not leave the finger of your friend Yoram. I fell a captive in the hands of the Philistines. They sold me to the Greeks, who robbed me of all I had, but this ring I saved as my only treasure. When I looked at it, I forgot my captivity, my misfortune and my bitter lot, and I thought only of you and all I loved. Now, tell me, I pray, my friend, is there a kin left me, or am I all alone in the world?"

Naame, being preoccupied with Amnon, did not notice Yoram's approach, but when she heard his voice, she immediately recognised it, and exclaimed, "What do I see! Did God say to the earth, 'Give up thy dead?'" She could say no more, being overwhelmed with joy, and she ran into his outstretched arms.

"Only God could show us such joy," said Yedidiah, embracing Yoram again. "Wondrous things hath God revealed to us. How can we thank Him for all His goodness and mercy? There is your innocent wife, Naame, the love of your youth, and here are your beautiful children, Amnon and Peninah. They will repay you for your sufferings during these past unhappy years. Our friendship is everlasting and it even existed between our children, before they knew that their parents had been friends."

Then Yedidiah told Yoram all that had taken place from the time he had been taken captive until the present time. Yoram then embraced Naame again, and said, "Oh, my innocent wife! I have longed for you twenty years. Now all my sorrows have suddenly

changed to joy, an everlasting joy, and I pray God may strengthen me, so that I shall not be overcome with this great happiness!"

"Oh, thou lord of my youth!" cried Naame, with tears. "For your sake, God hath given me strength to live after enduring so much pain and disgrace. But my bitter days have passed away like a cloud, and like midday will the new life shine for us!"

Naame then took Amnon and Peninah by the hand, and led them before Yoram, saying, "Embrace, my husband, my children, your offspring! They suffered with me in the days of our affliction!"

Yoram embraced Amnon, and kissing him, said, "Oh, you noble youth! Are you really my own son? You held a place in my heart on the Island of Kapthar. I nursed you in your sickness and your agonies. Since then my heart was close to yours. I loved you, not knowing what you were to me."

"Oh, father, crown of my head," cried Amnon, "I, too, loved you, not knowing who you were to me!"

Yoram then turned to Peninah, saying, "What is your name, my dear, sweet daughter?"

"Peninah is my name," answered the girl.

"Peninah," repeated Yoram. "Manifold are Thy mercies, oh, God! How happy I would have been if I had found but one kin, and how much happier I am that I have found you all again, and you, my friends and relatives! Avicha and Sisry, benefactors of my family, how shall I reward you? I give to you, Avicha, my possessions in Bethlehem, for your guardianship and care of my son Amnon. And to you, Sisry, I give my possessions in Carmel, for the benevolence and mercy you have shown to my beloved wife and to my darling daughter Peninah." Turning to the traveling merchant, he continued, "How can I repay you for all the services you have rendered to my son and to me? All my wealth is not enough to repay you for your deeds. You have brought back the hearts of the parents to the children, and united the hearts of the lovers."

"And I brought thee from the distant lands to be near thy loved ones," said the traveling merchant. "So I want to be near thy God, whose glory became known to all the inhabitants of the world.

The clash of swords and the roar of shots have ceased everywhere, and peace has returned to all the nations far and near. Therefore, I will attach myself to the people, for the God of Zion is greater than all the gods of other nations, and to Him belong the greatness, the strength and the glory. Let us go to God's house and let us approach Him with praise and offerings."

All present congratulated him, and called him "One of us," and they said, "May God of Jacob, who was favourable to His children, favour you forever and unite you to the House of Jacob."

Yedidiah, Yoram and the merchant went to the Temple, and there offered their thanksgiving offerings and praised God for His mercy and for His wondrous deeds. When they turned to the summer palace, they feasted together and made merry. And Yedidiah said, "See, my friend Yoram, that which I told you twenty years ago came true. I told you that when God brought you back safely to us, we would offer thanksgiving to God and would rejoice in this summer palace together with our families."

"Thank God," said Hananeel, when he saw Amnon and Tamar happy in their love. "Thank God, my dream is realized, and all the mysteries are unveiled!"

"I, also, am happy," said Teman, kissing Peninah. "I am happy that God gave back to me that which He had taken from me, and the sapphire and the ring are united forever."

And Tamar, taking Amnon's hand in hers, said, "Remember my words which I so often repeated, 'Hope, Amnon, hope is better than life?'" Amnon embraced her, and kissing her, said, "I have hoped, my love, I have hoped, and your love is dearer to me than life."