

## When David Danced

2Samuel 6

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I remember the first time I saw him. It was after another round of fighting with the army of the Philistines. This time the Israelites had enjoyed great success. Even the mighty Philistine champion, Goliath, had fallen. David was the one who challenged him, when no one else would. David was the one who killed him, inspiring the rout of our enemies that followed. And now they were returning home in triumph -- my father, Saul, and all the rest of my father's soldiers, and David.

The news of David's exploit preceded the soldiers' return and in every town women crowded the streets to catch a glimpse of him as he passed and to shout the praises of their new hero and of their king, my father. Even in Saul's home town, my home town, they were singing and shouting: *Saul has killed thousands, but David tens of thousands!*

I did not join in the shouting, but I saw him. I saw him walking among a cluster of soldiers close behind the king. I saw him and it was at that moment I began to love him.

He was often in my father's court after that, at least when he was not out on some military errand. And every day I saw him, I loved him more. He was strong, but also gentle and kind. He was clearly a warrior, but not warlike. He seemed to treat all those around him with equal love and generosity. He was kind to me, but he was kind too to the girls who served me. He loved my father. He served my father well and both his words and his actions exemplified his unwavering loyalty to the king. David had to have been aware of his growing popularity among the Israelites, but it seemed not to affect or alter his manner at all.

My father was certainly aware. As David's fame grew, so grew my father's hatred and fear. It was then I began to be ashamed of my father.

My father did consent to give me to David in marriage, but I know that it was not out of any love for David or for me. He demanded as bride price the payment of the foreskins of one hundred Philistine soldiers. What a brazen request! But David must have read it as an opportunity to prove himself worthy of the king's daughter and he brought back two hundred. I am certain that Saul meant for David to die in the attempt.

And so we were married. Michal, the king's daughter, now the wife of Israel's finest hero and, more than that, the life companion of her truest love. But we could not be happy for long. The king was much too insecure, much too consumed with jealousy and hatred.

One night I overheard him speaking to several of his guard, instructing them to watch our house and to kill David when the opportunity presented itself. I ran to warn David. I let him down out of the window and I bought him some time by telling the guard that David was sick. I stuffed his bed to make them think David was still in it. I did what I could to help him escape, but then, he was gone ...

It was many years before I saw him again. Was it ten or twelve or more still? It seemed like a lifetime, or it seemed rather that the short time with David had not been a real part of my life at all, but only a dream.

I heard regular reports of him. My father never gave up pursuing this man he considered his greatest threat. I heard of David's repeated escapes and of his heroic battles in defense of the Israelite people despite the obvious risk of exposing his location to Saul. I heard of the time he could have killed my father, when my father entered the cave where David and his men were hiding. David chose instead only to cut away a piece of Saul's robe as proof of his opportunity. If I were not so ashamed of that man, my father, I could have almost laughed at the story, or even pitied him as David pitied him.

After David had gone, my father gave me to another man, to Palti. He loved me; he was good to me; he doted on me. I think he considered himself extraordinarily fortunate to have the king's daughter for a wife. In my own way I loved him too and served him well for the years I spent with him. But it was not like it was with David.

And then, all at once, Saul was dead, and Jonathan, my brother, was dead. Jonathan was killed by Philistine soldiers, and my father died by his own hand rather than leave himself at their mercy. The king was dead and Israel was in turmoil.

Armies loyal to Saul's son, Ishbosheth, battled armies loyal to David for supremacy. But the future clearly belonged to David. Soon David would be made king of a reunited Israel. And when Ishbosheth's commander went to join forces with David ... David asked for me. He asked for me!

I did not know what to think. It had been so long! So much had changed. I was filled with so many different feelings, conflicting feelings. I was excited and eager - I would be wife to the one who would be king of all Israel! I would be his queen! And I was afraid. Why had he asked for me? Why would he want me back? What were his motives in bringing the daughter of Saul into his house again? He had other wives now.

It did make political sense to make peace with the house of Saul. David would win the affection of many of those still loyal to Saul's family, and he would reclaim the entitlement my father once had given him. Were these the reasons he asked for me?

They brought me to him and I saw David once again. And he loved me. He loved me as simply and as plainly as he had once loved me before. He had not changed, but maybe I had.

Soon after I returned to David's house, after he was made king of all Israel and had established his residence in Jerusalem, he began talking about the Covenant Box. This was the holy box brought across the desert with Moses, the container of the symbols of God's providence for our people, the box that was said to be the throne itself of Yahweh, the Lord.

It was precious to the people. The sight of the box filled them with awe and terror and love. It represented the power of the Lord God Almighty among us, though it was clear we could not manipulate its power for our own purposes. Years ago we tried to use the box to turn the tide in a losing battle, and our precious box was captured by the Philistines.

Now David wanted to bring the Covenant Box to Jerusalem. What a coup that would be for David! If he could wed the religious devotion of the people to their political allegiance, his ascendancy would be complete. They would look only to Jerusalem, only to him, for guidance and for leadership. I understood that.

I'm sure that David understood it too, but when he talked about the box, it was something else that moved him. He talked about wanting to set the Lord's throne at the center of the nation, about bringing God close to the heart of the people. He talked about his own love for the Lord who had walked with him all through his life. He talked about that love in a way that stirred feelings of jealousy within me.

There it was again -- his passion, simple and strong ... his ready and eager love for people, for all God's people it seemed, whatever their station ... his ready and eager love for the Lord. When he talked like that it moved me deeply, filling me with feelings I hardly recognized. And yet, when he talked like that, I despised him, too.

He was king, but he didn't seem to understand! He could be so -- I don't know - - unsophisticated. He lacked the true politician's craft, the powerbroker's savvy. He lacked the ego befitting the king. He still would make these spontaneous acts of selfless generosity; he still treated all his people -- himself and me included -- with equal respect; he seemed reluctant to claim his proper rights, his proper dignity, as the leading citizen of all Israel. He would not act like the great king he was, like the great king I knew he could so easily become!

He went to get the box, but he returned without it. And he was furious.

Apparently one or both of the oxen pulling the cart on which the box was laid stumbled and the cart tilted. One of those walking alongside reached out to steady the box and was struck dead on the spot!

David was furious ... not with the oxen, not with the man, not with his bad luck, but with God! I don't know what really happened or how anyone could hold God responsible, but David did.

He raved. His voice was filled with bitterness, but also with doubt and fear and bewilderment. His dream was thwarted; he was baffled by the one he loved most, spurned by the one he wanted most to serve, and he didn't know what to do. I watched amazed ... amazed at a man addressing God -- the Lord God Almighty! -- with that sort of familiarity, with that level of expectation. It was as if he fully expected God to hear his complaint, to acknowledge his disappointment, to answer his questions.

David worked through his anger. I don't know how, but he did. He received reports that the people keeping the Covenant Box were enjoying great fortune, and he decided again to bring the box to Jerusalem. Even without that news, I think he would have gone back for the box anyway. Apparently he could be angry with the Lord and love the Lord still ...

This time they made it to the city with the Covenant Box. There they were in long parade -- what a tumult of sight and sound! -- and there was David, at the head of the procession ... dancing. Not in royal robes, but dressed in the simple linen robe of a priest and half-naked at that! David dancing and singing and carrying on like ... like anything but a king!

I was disgusted with him. I was humiliated and embarrassed -- for him and for myself. Once more I was ashamed of a man I had once loved.

But this was not like the shame I held for Saul, my father. I was ashamed of Saul's weakness, of his cowardice, of his lack of love. I was ashamed of David for this inexcusable public display, but at the same time I envied him. I saw in him, in his unfettered joy, something I did not have, something I will never have. What is it like to be filled with a joy like that? What is it like to hold a love like that deep in your heart and to shout it out for all the world to hear? What is it like to dance with all your might to honor the Lord?