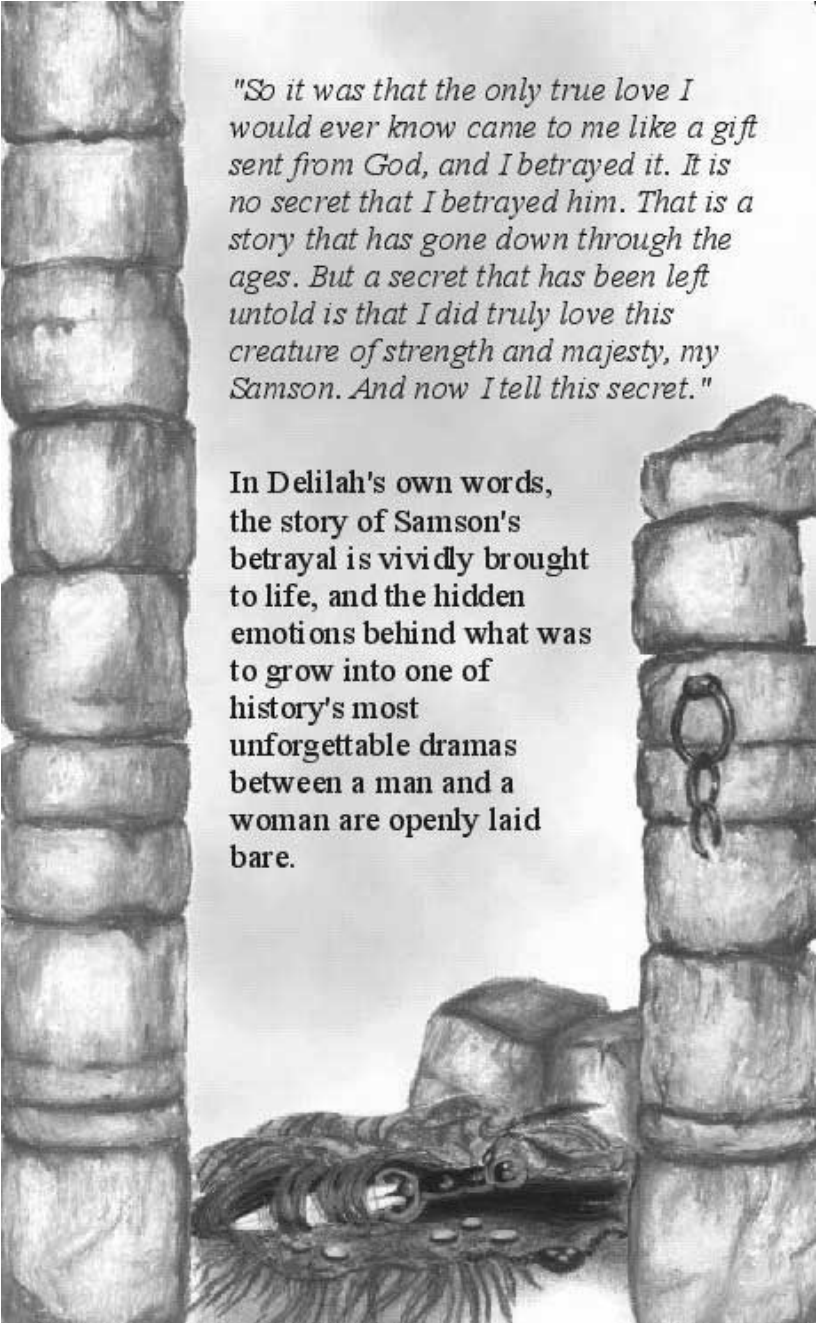




# Betrayal



*"So it was that the only true love I would ever know came to me like a gift sent from God, and I betrayed it. It is no secret that I betrayed him. That is a story that has gone down through the ages. But a secret that has been left untold is that I did truly love this creature of strength and majesty, my Samson. And now I tell this secret."*

In Delilah's own words, the story of Samson's betrayal is vividly brought to life, and the hidden emotions behind what was to grow into one of history's most unforgettable dramas between a man and a woman are openly laid bare.

# Betrayal

AS TOLD BY DELILAH

Cover and illustrations by Rain  
Map insert by Darren

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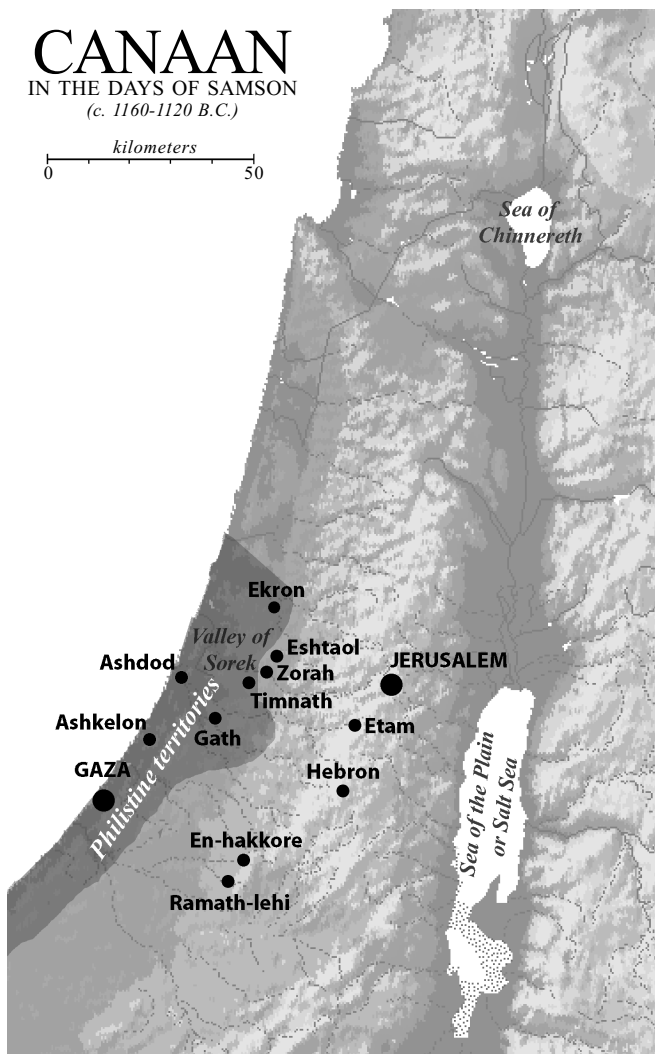
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# CANAAN

IN THE DAYS OF SAMSON  
(c. 1160-1120 B.C.)

kilometers  
0 50



The full biblical account of Samson can be found in the Book of Judges, chapters 13 to 16.

## PREFACE

*Afterward it happened that Samson loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him."*

(Judges 16:4,5 NKJ)

So it was that the only true love I would ever know came to me like a gift sent from God, and I betrayed it. It is no secret that I betrayed him. That is a story that has gone down through the ages. But a secret that has been left untold is that I did truly love this creature of strength and majesty, my Samson. And now I tell this secret.

Oh, my Samson! He walked into my life, as many other men did. I was after all, a princess of beauty. At six and twenty years of age, I was small in stature, yet fairly strong and robust. I had long red hair, a face such as a goddess would possess, and sharp green eyes that I had trained to belie what went on in those secret chambers of my heart—the sinister motives, the selfishness. My life knew no gambles. I preyed upon the weaknesses of those who have been called

## BETRAYAL

the stronger sex, and took great pleasure in the power it brought me.

It sounds so like a story, but it is the truth and even I cannot change it: The day Samson's handsome eyes met mine, my very life began to change from within. Yes, only within! It was the outer image that I would cling to so fiercely—Delilah the proud! Delilah, feared by men! Delilah, wise and crafty in the ways of the world of my time—an image which brought me to the very door of something that had been but a trifle in those bygone days before I met Samson. I would enter that door a final time—unwittingly perhaps, but enter it just the same: the door of betrayal. And the door would shut hard behind me, my steps never to be retraced.

Strong as Samson was, there was within his eyes a helplessness, a longing, perhaps even a valiant show of weakness and vulnerability that drew me. I remember the day as if it were yesterday...



- 1 -

“Delilah, you’ve been long enough without a man in your life,” my drunken friend—hardly a man himself—drawled at a private party at my house. “I hear there’s one great man who just entered the Valley of Sorek. From Timnath it was, perhaps? Or perhaps not. I can’t be sure. Oh well, never mind where he came from. But he is here, not too far away. Perhaps one of your servant boys or maids can fetch him. Then again, I hear he’s quite the ladies’ man. You’d best fetch him yourself, not send any of those maids of yours to him. He might...”

“Oh hush, Girad! Men, men, men. They sicken me, you know. You have known me far too long to think I would still be interested after the last episode with... Ugh! Can’t even say his name.”

“Well there now, don’t pretend to be too repulsed. You said it long enough, and apparently lovingly enough, to win his heart ... or, er, was it the entire contents of his purse? He might as well have just included you in his inheritance, only he didn’t have any left once you were through. And I did notice quite a few new luxuries in this palace of yours.”

“Girad, we’ll not talk about all this. You know that this is just a way of life, and I won’t have you belittling it.”

"At least you have a sense of pride in the dirty work you do."

"At least you have a friendly enough face, or else I'd poison your next drink. Now watch your words."

"Ooooooh! The lady's getting feisty tonight. Here, have another sip of wine. It'll do your temper good. Now back to that man, the Hebrew one."

"Oh! A smelly one, you mean," I said, with a look of disgust, as one who had just tasted something rotten.

Girad broke out into a hideous peal of laughter.

"Princess, you are so picky. I'm sure if his wealth is great, it would make up for whatever odors he possesses. Though really, truly now, I think it is never wise to lump an entire people under one description. But ... but I think you would find this one fairly charming. I know what I'll do. I'll fetch him and bring him to the next party," he said with some finality as he brought the cup to his lips and tipped his head way back to get every last drop.

"Oh, you silly man. Leave me be. I'll fish for my own catch, in my own time."

Eyeing the inside of his cup as if that would help hidden wine appear from within the clay, Girad said, "You had better get busy with something before your boss comes up with some ploy and you become bait again instead of the fisher. He has plans, I've heard."

I raised one lofty eyebrow indifferently. My eyes expressed whatever emotion I wished to portray at that moment, be it true or a pretence. I was a swindler and a cheater in the guise of a goddess, and though many knew of it, my beauty feigned innocence and would draw them. Then, in their moment of weakness, I would prey upon them, subtly enough so that I might come back again

and again, till I had drawn all that I needed from them. But in that portion of my heart where I dared never go—till Samson came along and made me look therein; in fact, nigh dwell there for some time—I longed for the innocence of my childhood days. Those blessed days before I had taken the now well-worn path of selfishness and greed.

“Oh ... oh, my dear, dear friend Delilah, how could I have forgotten? Yes, yes, I remember now. You refused to work for Ekkor any longer. Why he ever allowed you to ‘disown’ him like you say he did, will forever remain a mystery. He is a hard man, from all I can remember.”

“He is related to me,” I said with a shrug. “Somewhere within, I suppose, he has come in touch with his sense of family. ... Or perhaps only awakened a dormant strain of nepotism.” I mused the latter sentence more under my breath, though Girad heard it and smirked at my insolence. Deep inside, I was not as haughty as I purported to be. Truly I was a little scared of the short, fat, greedy man who had somehow found himself in the unlucky position of being my only living relative.

*Now there*, I comforted myself, *watch your step and you may continue to rule your own house*. I was rather frightened of Ekkor. The stakes were high with him, and there was no forgiveness of mistakes. When I worked for him, I had had to get him what he wanted—wealth, power, whatever, and not a pinch less, or it could be my life. But I would not show my fright for the world.

“Did I forget to tell you?” Girad’s voice woke me out of my reverie. “This man is somewhat of a legend. There have been many tales of his great strength, though I don’t know how many of them could be true. But what is true is that he has become an influential judge in Israel. Does the word ‘power’ mean anything to you?”

"No, my fetish is for riches, rather, at this point in my life. They'll get me power when I need it."

Girad laughed his hideous laugh before taking another sip and leaning back on the couch, twirling a grape between his fingers. "Hmmm, poor men who find themselves thus betwixt your fingertips, dainty as they are ... er, your fingertips, that is. Nothing but purity and helplessness emanating from those pale green bewitching eyes of yours ... or, are they pale? ... Well, anyhow, the world looks different from a pair of drunken eyes like mine. And then, you twirl these poor fools about like I do this grape here now." He demonstrated as I rolled my eyes in obvious disdain. "Then suddenly, and without warning, the poor unsuspecting individuals are crushed." And with that he proceeded to crush the grape between his fingers. "Really, now," he added, "must it be so messy? Why don't you just eat them?"

"Come now, you disgusting drunken man. Even though you have been my friend for these many years, sometimes I do honestly wish you were that little grape you just crushed." I got up and, with great effort, pulled him to his feet, flung his arm over my shoulders and promptly began to drag him to wherever it was the servants had all gone to.

"My, my, darling. You are so harsh," he said sleepily, and then his head fell on my shoulder, along with the rest of his weight. He was fast asleep. I struggled under his weight but managed to drag him a few more steps.

"Danar! Come help me with this foul load!" I called.

Danar, one of my servants, came running. He quickly picked Girad up and awaited instructions.

"Take him to the garden. Throw him on the lawn," I instructed. He was about to obey as he was used to doing, when I changed my mind, "No,

no. Don't do that. Take him to a spare room. He can find his way out in the morning."

In the quietness of my bedchambers I began to think about that man Girad had talked about. I crinkled my nose up when I suddenly caught a whiff of that strong wine that Girad had been drinking. The smell was awfully close, and I determined to find the source so I could rid myself of it. Ah, he'd drooled some onto the shoulder of my dress. I quickly took off the soiled garment. I could hear in the distance the pouring of water—the readying of my bath, which I so loved.

In no time my maid, Jeila, had finished. As I bathed, I found my thoughts lingering on none other than the curious man Girad had spoken of. Wealthy youth that Girad was, surely there must be something about this Hebrew that impressed him, for he did not merely talk or gossip for the sake of it. If nothing else, I was intensely curious. I wanted to see what he was like, what it was about him that had impressed Girad, and—if indeed there was anything—whether it would impress me as well.

It was odd, though—much as I disdained men, they also fascinated me. Never mind the contradiction. I was always a contradiction, Girad told me. He was my only friend, and even that was not on account of my friendliness. He had just somehow managed to evade being the object of my cheating; perhaps because he seemed too foolish and careless to pose a challenge for me. Not that I cared that I had swindled myself out of any other friends. I was too busy caring for myself to be bothered with emotional attachments of any sort.

I closed my eyes and tried to picture this Hebrew judge. I imagined him bathing with me, sensual creature that I was. I passed a finger so slightly over my forehead, nose and lips. Then I looked beside me at my silhouette upon the wall. I traced

## BETRAYAL

its contour, imagining how he would fall for my beauty without a moment's hesitation—and not only fall for it, but be fascinated by it. It was a reaction that I most prided myself in being able to evoke, and something that would be enough to fill my appetite for worship till I was bored and would cast him aside like the other puppies who had suffered the same fate.

I curled up in the bath, submerging my entire self below the surface of the water. The rising bubbles were the only outlet of the glee I felt was but a meeting away. I had only to meet him. What my maid thought of my peculiar and self-absorbed behavior, I didn't know. But it hardly mattered. I never knew what her thoughts were. It was not her place to say anything. Only to serve. Only to wait.

And that was how I saw the whole world. It was all there for me, to serve me, to wait upon me. Yes, even to wait *for* me. I would eventually come around to gather up my share from its four corners. Ah, life was not long enough for all that I had to do! But here was no hurry. No need to pursue hard after it. It would all come to me like it was meant to.



“Girad! Girad!” I violently shook my drunken friend. He had slept very late, perhaps out of hesitation to meet with the hangover that was awaiting him. The moment he opened his eyes, I knew that the hangover had greeted him. He doubled over in pain.

“Aaargh! Why ... why must you wake me? My head! Ohhhh...”

But I was not known for my compassion. “Get up, Girad! Be a man now, and stop all this squirming about.”

“Have you ever ... oooohhhh, have you ever had a hangover?”

"I am not the reckless type, remember?"

"And how could I forget?" he moaned, and passed his arm over his forehead in an attempt to shield his eyes from the sunlight coming from the half-shuttered window.

"Girad," I said softly in that tone that I always used when I wanted something and was not patient about waiting for it. He struggled to open one eye to look at me, his arm still covering his forehead.

"My God, woman? How can you look so beautiful always?" He smiled ruefully. "And yet never do you accompany it with sweetness. You are so wicked, and so..."

I raised that one eyebrow nonchalantly. I was hoping he would find the word he sought for, so that we could get on with the conversation. But I could not wait.

"Never mind *what* I am, you have all your life to tell me that. But this is important."

Girad was obviously still under the influence of the wine that had left such a strong odor on his lips and in his breath. He smiled, for he was in that world of his where what I wanted seemed but a trifle to him. I always wanted something, and he just watched in amusement.

"Why is it that I never fell for your beauty, Delilah?" he said, with a clumsy smile.

"I'm sure you did somewhere along the line. Now..."

"And I'm sure I didn't," he said just as nonchalantly, and then closed the one eye that had been open all this while. But he wouldn't find more sleep.

"Aaargh! Why do you shake me so? Let a man sleep. I have no work to do today." Then he smiled. He never worked. He was the youngest and most severely spoiled son of a wealthy family. He was much like myself in the immature, insouciant way

he greeted life and all it dealt him. Only I was clever and preferred to manipulate, while he preferred to let nothing shock him. Rather than use his mind, he was content to abuse the companion that had been fated to him—drink.

“Oh, but you do have work—for me!”

That one sleepy eye had to open again. “Will I be paid for this favor?” He gave his knowing grin. He knew that if I wanted something badly enough, I would be willing to part with money—that great love of mine—which he could then use to stock his cellars with more of that alcoholic love which had earned his supreme loyalty.

“Alright, alright. Just get me that man.”

“What man?”

I rolled my eyes in disgust that he had forgotten so soon our conversation of yesternight.

Then that foolish grin plastered itself recklessly on his face again. “Ah, yes. The strong one. The judge. The ... Samson, the Israelite.” He rubbed his face with his hands, as if that would wake him more.

“Samson the whatever, I don’t care. I want to meet him.”

“And meet him you shall—if you pay me well.”

“I’ll pay you whatever I like. Now go.”

“Come, come now, my girl. You mustn’t treat a childhood friend as a servant. Especially when that childhood friend has something you want—or knows how to get it. Now there, you behave.” He spoke patronizingly as he sat up and pinched my cheek. I didn’t say a word, nor did I budge. My mind was away, far into my closet, wondering what I should wear for my first meeting with this Samson.

Girad went groaning and hobbling out of the room, willing to do this favor for me not because he was my friend, but because he knew that I had



spoiled myself greatly and would pay him well to indulge me in another one of my games.

It was not too much later that I was in my room, my maids about me, adorning me. I walked about as a spoiled child.

“No, no! Not that. That won’t do. The combination makes me look like a common whore.” I added the last phrase almost below my breath as one of my servants attempted to help me choose some jewelry to match my garments. One of them came and wrapped an additional veil about my hips and looked for my approval. “Hmmm,” I stalled, examining the choice. “The colors match nicely, but I look like a saddled ass, so wide and cumbersome. No, no,” I concluded, motioning for her to take the veil off.

“Ah, yes. That one will more than do.” I returned my attention to the maid choosing the jewelry. I smiled approvingly at her choice of a necklace with a large pendant. She obediently put it about me, and I was pleased. It hung neatly around my neck and timidly sat at the beginning of my cleavage.

The maid with the veil returned with a simpler sash, tasseled and white. She wrapped it delicately about me, and it served to emphasize the shapely hips I was so proud of. I nodded in approval, and she looked relieved.

*It has been too long since hunting season, I caught myself thinking. Then my subconscious mind disagreed. No, no. Let us not have any motives for this one. Only desire. It has been some time since my body has been ravished. I crave a good strong man who might give me pleasure. Ah, yes, that’s the better way to think. No hunting this time, you wicked little girl.*



I sat comfortably, yet in every way as a princess, upon the couch on my porch. There were hanging

plants about, and my garments matched the atmosphere ... even the dimming twilight colors of the venue I'd chosen for our first meeting. It was exquisite. I would have it nothing less than perfect.

My red wavy hair was partly held up in a majestic bun, which one of my maids had so painstakingly arranged earlier that afternoon. The rest of my long locks hung over my shoulder, or lay in little coils along the couch just beside my arm. I lay on my side, covering the full length of the couch, leaning my whole upper body on the delicate pivot of my right forearm. One of my legs stretched out enticingly over the couch, while the other was slightly bent at the knee in an equally graceful position over the outstretched one, my toes pointed out daintily.

I was the picture of relaxed beauty, though in truth I was not entirely relaxed. Something about this meeting sent a strange, apprehensive shiver along my outstretched body. But I was not the superstitious sort. I had made my own way in the world, and was confident that no higher power was able to do anything to interfere. I had planned everything so well. I would not be ruffled by the sudden gust of cool wind that broke the spell of the departing warm and lazy afternoon and then left with no evidence of its ever having been there.

The grape I was eating so perfectly was nearly shoved down my throat in a hurry when I heard an unfamiliar voice, which I took to be Samson's. My eyebrows knitted in a momentarily angry pout that Girad had simply sent the man on up and had not told one of the maids to inform me, or informed me himself. But the annoyed feeling melted soon enough.

"May I enter?" came the repeated request. I jumped as I realized that in all my musing I had

not answered him yet.

Mustering all the grace and charm I could, I got up—perhaps a little too clumsily for my taste—drew aside the curtain that separated the porch from my sitting room, and motioned with my left hand for him to follow me. I would not get more than this passing glance of him until I was seated upon my couch again, and he on the one I motioned him towards.

“If your voice is anything as beautiful as you are, you should not be afraid to use it,” he said kindly, though obviously referring to the fact that I had not said one word yet. “Or perhaps I surprised you,” he said intuitively. “I am so sorry. May I?” he asked, referring to the large basket of fruit that sat in front of him, one of Jeila’s decorative masterpieces.

“The Philistine fruits are so delicious—so perfect. Almost as perfect as...,” then he chuckled to himself, and I remembered that Girad had said he was a ladies’ man. No doubt, I realized, as I took in the man before me; he had the figure for it, in spite of having passed the better part of his forty-some years. But his most outstanding feature was his long, brownish hair that reached far down his well-shaped back. The outermost layers were tinted a golden color, as if the sun had poured its blessing on his rich and healthy mane. Seven noticeable braids began at his forehead, and were pulled back, along with the rest of his hair, and tied at his neck by a thick string. The braids were long, and I would later love to hold them and play with them.

Samson’s eyes were light brown, and they charmed me from the moment they looked into mine. He had an equally charming smile, framed by a fairly square jaw. His simple clothing—a half-sleeved cloth that ran from his shoulders nearly

to the floor, and a rough cloak that draped over one shoulder—was not what I had expected of a powerful judge. But it accentuated his natural manliness. He was large and muscular, but not exceptionally so, though I will not contend with the fact that most men his age or even younger were not nearly as shapely nor so obviously strength-endowed as he. Legend or not, I knew he was not one to be easily defeated in a man-to-man fight. Yet I would discover that even the strongest soldier who matched him in body did not have a fraction of his supernatural strength.

As we spoke, I would learn of this strength, and how he had used it, and quickly decide that I would be very careful with him, for I would not in the least like to incur his wrath. Who would? Yet, in contradiction to all his strength, he was capable of a most enchanting gentleness—a magically soft and marvelous gentleness that shone out of his eyes and overflowed into his smile. Even at this first meeting I imagined that he could look quite majestic and fearsome were he ever angered.

“Tell me about yourself, Samson,” I said, being as fascinated as I made myself look that instant.

He laughed. “And what would you like to know? Perhaps you should tell me something about yourself—you look like you lead a fairly colorful life,” he said casually as he took a hearty bite of whatever fruit it was he held in his hand.

I blushed and was almost upset. “W-w-what do you mean, Samson?” I liked the sound of his name, and when I said it, I didn’t feel quite so upset anymore.

“You live alone in a beautiful house, you are no doubt wealthy, and I see that your father has not yet married you to anyone.”

“My father is dead. As is my mother.”

“Oh. I am so sorry. Please forgive me.”

"It's all right. How could you have known?" I was still perturbed that he so easily read into my life. I wasn't sure exactly what he meant by "colorful," but I had a few ideas, none of which I was to explore just yet. "Your name—Samson—it is a Hebrew name, is it not? What does it mean?"

"Mean?" he responded. "That's a peculiar question."

"Is it?"

He leaned back in his seat. "Perhaps not. It means 'man of the sun' or 'the sun man.'"

I smiled. "It's a very nice name, and with such a glorious meaning."

He just smiled back, and reached for another piece of fruit. I knew I would have to continue the conversation, for he seemed quite content listening to me talk and answering my questions, while he relaxed and sampled the variety of fruits that were before him.

"So tell me, Samson, about yourself. I hear you are somewhat of a legend among your people. Tell me about these stories of your great strength."

"Ah, I see that you are not wanting to talk about that colorful life of yours. All right, then."

I must tell you, Samson had a very unassuming side. He was unbelievably forthright and there was no hiding of his thoughts, yet at the same time he was kind. He was not at all fascinated with the strength he had been given; perhaps he even took it for granted.

"Delilah, did you want me to start?" he asked, amused, referring to the fact that my mind had drifted for a few moments. I don't know how long it was; just long enough to decide for sure that this should not be the last time we two met. I wondered how I could invite him to come again without appearing too obviously attracted. That would only serve to further dwarf my perceptions of myself

compared to this majestic creature.

I smiled and nodded. I was not used to being caught off guard so often in such a short space of time. Yet I didn't feel as flustered as I normally would have. I felt sheepish, perhaps.

Then he hesitated for a moment.

"What is it, Samson?"

"Why don't you tell me about yourself? I think I'd prefer to listen to your lovely voice while I eat some more of these," he nodded toward the fruit basket with a "may I?" look in his eye. Later, I came to understand that the reason he preferred at this moment to speak of something other than himself was because his life was fraught with conflicts with my people, something he did not like to accentuate in his encounters with women.

"Well?" he asked, and upon seeing my equal hesitation—though indeed for other reasons than his—he broke out into a hearty laugh. "It seems that we shall not be great friends then, for we are so unwilling to speak of ourselves that we may never get to know each other!" Then his laugh faded into a smile, as his eyes met mine for a moment.

"Alright, I shall tell you some things about myself," he acquiesced.

Those words produced a great curiosity in me. *Some things?* I always wanted what I could not have, to know what was hidden from me, to try to earn love from one who did not give it freely. And so the very fact that he had experiences that he perhaps treasured, or perhaps merely hid for some reason unknown to me, ignited both curiosity and desire within me. I would find those things out. And we would be friends—perhaps more.

All those thoughts taking not even a second to pass through my mind, I was not caught inattentive again when he began his story.

"I was born in Zorah. My mother was barren. Many years she had prayed to conceive, and had no doubt done all she and my father could," he added with a twinkle in his eye that either vanished as soon as it appeared, or perhaps I imagined it. "And then it was that..." He stopped, for a time too long to be a simple pause.

"Come now, Samson. Do not hesitate," I begged him.

"How can I expect you to understand—a Philistine?"

"But I did hear from my friend, Girad, that you have taken quite a liking to Philistine women. At least ... well, you were married to one, were you not?"

I could have sworn I saw a look of pain cross his face, filling his eyes for a moment. But as I stopped to ponder it, I found myself looking at that same charming smile which left me wondering if I had only imagined the flash of sorrow. He sighed. "Ah yes, I was. But we will not speak of that." Suddenly I felt denied. How could he shut me out like that? It did not matter to me that we did not know each other well. But perhaps it was this denial of his that egged me on, that drew me.

"There is something you must understand about our people, Delilah, that I am surprised you do not seem more aware of," he said with notable firmness, as if it was the one thing he would not back down on or part with merely for flirtation's sake—even love's sake. I never knew what prompted him to say this, what sequence of thoughts had brought him to a sudden change of topic.

"And what is that?" I said with all the inquisitiveness of a little girl, mixed with the saucy temperaments of an amateur temptress relaxing on her couch. I rolled over onto my stomach, and

rested my chin in the comfortable frame my hands made. The neck of my dress was quite low and I noted with a girlish delight that his eye had indeed wandered to the bosoms which were peeping out daringly. But his gaze soon returned to my eyes, as he continued.

“Our people, we believe in one God.”

“Ah yes, I know. Pity you can’t see Him as we can ours. We have a great...”

“I know of the image you worship as god,” he interrupted me as politely as anyone could, and said the last word with a tinge of hesitation, as if it weren’t really worthy to be called by the same name as the One he worshipped. “And our God does send messengers to us when He deems it important. They come to announce some important news, or perform some miraculous doing.”

“Sounds magical!” I responded, hoping that was the right thing to say. I was awed, not by his words at that point, but by his comeliness that complemented them.

“And so, tell me now of your mother and how she overcame her barren state.”

“Very well. A messenger from God...”

“*Your* God.”

“*The* God, for He is the one and only,” he stated simply, not leaving any room for argument from me before he continued. “A messenger from God appeared to my mother in the fields—so she has told me. He told her that she need not fear that she would never bear children, for God had seen to it that she would bear a son.”

“Oh! And it is that simple!” I said, and then I giggled. It was nothing like I had ever heard. Our god, Dagon—a creature half-fish and half-man, sculpted by craftsmen using anything from wood to gold—never sent any messengers to announce



anything. It all sounded so unearthly. I suppose that's because it was.

He nodded as if that was all too simplistic an observation. Of course it was simple!—That went without saying. These Israelites had such a fascinating culture! It teased and tantalized my brain—but no more at this point than Samson's intriguing person.

"I do not know what all transpired between my mother and the angel," he said. "My mother knew not his name, nor where he was from at first. But she quickly ascertained that he must have been sent from God, for how can one be in the presence of an angel of the Lord and not know of it?"

I merely raised my eyebrows in a noncommittal acknowledgement of this seemingly commonplace statement. How would I know the answer to that?

"She ran hastily through the fields and returned to my father and told him of all this. He fell down upon his knees, and begged our God to reveal more unto him. For if God was to promise them a child, they wanted nothing less than to raise him as God would have them to. Yet no answer came. All the night long my father lay awake, waiting for the sign. But it was not until the next day when my mother again was in the fields of wheat that the same angel appeared unto her once more. She told him that my father had prayed that the Lord send him again to instruct them in the care of their son, and she brought the messenger back to the house with her."

I sat, transfixed. It was all so unlike anything I had ever heard. And Samson was so unlike anyone I had ever seen. As strong and muscular as a hardy youth, yet with a maturity and knowledge in his face that revealed his age, he appealed to every sense of my womanliness. Had his story been boring, I would have listened anyhow. But this was

far from uninteresting.

“My father asked if he was the messenger from God, and the man said, ‘Yea, I am he.’” Samson made his voice more majestic as he repeated the words of the messenger, and put on a face of majesty to match.

“My father fell upon his knees and thanked him that he had come to them, and he begged him instruct them in what they should do with this child of promise. He said that my mother should not drink strong drink nor eat unclean food, and that she should adhere to whatever instructions he had given in the field, saying that I was to be dedicated to God from the womb.”

“And I suppose that your mother was diligent in observing all that this messenger ... of God...,” I added hesitantly, yet Samson was pleased that I had even said it, “...instructed. For you are strong, and have become a wise and respected judge of Israel.” I smiled flirtatiously.

He turned his head to the side a moment in disagreement. “I have not always been wise.” And again I thought I saw a flash of sorrow, as if some painful memory had swept across his mind in a wild effort to overcome him with remorse. This time the smile seemed to take longer to return. I made an effort to break the awkward silence with lighthearted chatter.

“Oh, but what of your strength? I think that should compensate for any lack of wisdom, should it not?”

“Perhaps. But it shall not save me forever.”

“You speak so despondently, Samson.”

“It is important that we are all aware of our limitations.”

“But we should not take too great heed to them, lest we further limit ourselves out of fear.” I tried to speak with the same resounding wisdom and

experience that had taught him well.

Samson just smiled.

“And now, fair man, what of your strength? Do you have any tales of heroism that you could entertain me with?”

“A great many!” he said, with a momentary disrobing of his humility that left me even more intrigued at his character. He had up till now seemed strangely meek for a man of his ability—so unassuming that I thought such a character would embrace his enemies or invite them to a feast sooner than fight them. Yet I knew that somewhere there must be a passion within that muscular frame. And I had struck upon a portion of it, it seemed!

As I would come to discover, life had borne him harsh blows—yet perhaps even this was not due to life’s intention to do him harm, only life’s reaction to his folly. It seemed he was quite headstrong. What man would not be if he had the strength to force his way through many of life’s obstacles? Samson’s strength, after all, had gotten him out of a good many skirmishes and troubles, though perhaps his folly had gotten him into a good many of those to begin with.

“And where shall we begin?” I asked, eager to hear of his exploits.

“You say you have not heard anything of me?” he asked. It was as if a second thought had entered into his mind and reined in his manly pride with a bit of thoughtfulness.

I did not know that he was considering whether he should so starkly bring up the great injustices my people had put upon his people, and what God had intended to do about it through making him their deliverer. Considering I seemed as ignorant as I was about anything aside from myself and my wants, he did not even know if I knew *what* my

people had done—at least not in great detail, never mind what *he* had done to my people.

“Nothing save what my friend Girad told me of,” I answered truthfully.

He seemed puzzled for a moment. “I have found myself in not too small a number of conflicts with your people. It is odd that you know not a thing of these,” he said under his breath, every word getting quieter as his mind seemed to caution him to take some care to not offend his beautiful company unnecessarily. But I heard every word, down to the last and the most quietly uttered one.

“Oh, perhaps I have heard, but I am... These things sometimes escape me.” Of a truth, the reason I did not know was because I cared little about the policies of our nation, and even if I had, most of the stories that made up the legend he had become among his own people had occurred during my childhood.

Though there was still much talk of Samson in some Philistine circles (as I would later discover for myself), for the moment, being the very self-centered woman that I was, such topics of the male conflicts that beset our territories hardly inspired my interest. But now I wanted to hear of his heroism—perhaps to give me a greater desire to seduce this delightful gift from the gods to womankind.

“Well, I shall tell you some other time, then, for the hour is getting late and I have promised...” He got up to go.

“Oh please, Samson! You mustn’t leave yet. I live so alone here.”

“Why, you must have twenty-some servants in all—perhaps more hidden away. Surely they could keep you company,” he said, teasing me.

Being a charmer himself, he was not easy for me to seduce. It was only our first meeting, true,

on the sole pretext of being introduced to each other—though I did not know how Girad had put this across to the man whose company I was enjoying—but I had not lived by many rules in my life.

I stood for a moment, speechless. How could I persuade this unusually strong man whom I did not know and who was this whole time sober as a man could be—not a sip of wine had met his lips—to stay with me this night? For a moment I thought that perhaps he was aware that the one who had such a delightful outer appearance as I did was used to getting her own way, and that he would teach me a little lesson. But that was not the case at all. Instead, he was remembering all too vividly the horrors of his first involvement with a woman of his enemies' kin, and was loathe to risk experiencing it again.

The moonlight bathed the whole of our bodies as we stood there, gazing silently into each other's eyes for a moment. My head was lifted upwards, for I was a good deal smaller than he, and my long red hair appeared to be a good deal longer for that. I could feel the strands caressing my thighs each in their turn through the thin material of my dress as they obeyed the evening wind's command to dance across the back of my legs.

Some painful memory of his marriage, I remember thinking (since it was at that mention that I had noted a reflection of sorrow in his eye), must have prevented him from staying willingly. I tried hard to review what little Girad had told me, and what I had heard from Samson as well, for any hints as to what I could use to draw more out of this puzzling man. But I had not listened as carefully as I had looked. Had anyone asked me just then, I could have told them the tiniest detail of Samson's appearance, yet not near as much of

the things of which he had spoken.

Just then a sudden gust of wind sent the hair that still roamed freely across my back flying in all directions about me. A group of strands whipped Samson's neck and then retreated back across my face. And I still remember it now, how he so gently pulled each strand from across my face and tucked them behind my ear. Then the back of his fingers stroked my soft cheek and he kissed my forehead.

"It was a delightful occasion, this evening," he said politely, with a barely detectable note of tenderness. "Perhaps I shall come this way again; it is the warmest place in the Valley of Sorek."

I returned his smile with one of my own.

I watched with greater longing than I had ever remembered experiencing, as that almost stately figure walked out of my home. I hugged myself, each hand embracing the other arm, in an attempt to warm myself. As I did, I imagined how nice it would have been if he had stayed so that I wouldn't have to be hugging myself, rubbing my own skin to warm me. Oh, he could have done that quite nicely for me.

I could not remember the last time someone had drawn me so. I was not normally so compelled to fulfill some craving, and for a moment the longing was so great that I wished even one of my admirers whom I had not yet welcomed into the circle of my conniving charms were around, that they might do that service in his stead. But since no one was, I decided to go to sleep on that fond thought.



The next morning I slept in quite late. Perhaps it was a reluctance to return from that fanciful dreamland that I had entered and to face reality. Soon enough the sun's rays shouted in my face and I awoke, forgetting for a moment who and

where I was.

It all became clear when I saw Girad standing at the door, swinging the end of his belt between his awkward fingers.

“Well?” he said, smiling naughtily.

“Well, what?” I murmured. I noticed his impish grin, but was in no mood to play along with his foolishness. I was still recovering from the fact that those wondrous dreams that had graced me all night were merely that—dreams. I had not slept with that hunk of a man, but had only dreamt that I had. I sighed. But I would yet, I resolved, and that thought cheered me.

Then my attention turned back to Girad who stood there, that silly smirk still not gone. His impish pleasure quite upset me.

“Well, nothing,” I said, answering my own question as I pulled the covers off of me and prepared to get out of bed. “Now get out of here so I can get dressed.”

“Hmmm, it appears to me that you have not quite gotten what you had wanted—or perhaps you didn’t measure up to the man’s great wisdom and strength. Something of that sort. Otherwise I think you would have much more of a gleeful countenance. You do not yet have him in the palm of your hand,” he said, with obvious pleasure to have something to tease me about.

I raised my eyebrows haughtily. “I said, get out! I’ll come see you later.”

Good-humored fellow that Girad was, he walked out without argument. Once he was gone, I lay back on the bed, pouting. Not that I would have invited Samson to stay on the first night; although I wanted to, that would have been too quick and too base for me. I knew—I sensed—that somehow I did not seem to have impressed Samson as greatly as I had wished to.

## BETRAYAL

Not overly eager to explore those unpleasant thoughts of my incompetence and disappointment in myself, I tried to turn my thoughts to something more cheerful or indulgent.

Closing my eyes I drew up a mental picture of my wardrobe and how I would beautify myself for the day. That usually worked. But not today. Frustrated that a mere man (though mere he was not, I admitted quickly) could have such an effect on my entire mood, I resolved to endure the fact that my vanity was taking a momentary vacation while I busied myself with other thoughts. I tied my hair in a bun at the nape of my neck, threw a long robe about me and sauntered out to where Girad was.

My eyes squinted at the sunlight. Girad had obviously gotten quite used to the brightness, sitting there, still managing to produce another impish grin at the sight of me and my casual appearance. I clumsily sat down on the couch on that same garden porch where Samson and I had talked the day before, and brought my knees up to my chest.

Several minutes passed, and it didn't seem that I was going to be the one making the conversation this morning. I sat there looking at the ground, with the countenance of one who wished they had gotten hours more sleep but had been dragged out of bed by some friend who was only looking for sport. Girad must have concluded the same, and decided he would take the lead.

"Must have been some man! I haven't seen you like this for as long as I can remember. Well, unless you count the time that your bets came in so poorly at the festival and made you look bad in front of that Philistine lord who you were trying so hard to impress."

"Ha!" I said mockingly. I did not find it funny at all.



“So Samson turned you down, did he?” Girad said with a little more seriousness, getting to the root of the matter.

I looked away, not wanting to say anything. I did not really think Samson was impressed enough to be irresistibly drawn to my company. At least, I did not quite *want* to think of it that way. That was how the others I showed attention to had been; he was different. Finally I muttered, “Well, I think he had some other matters to tend to, for he left rather quickly. And what makes you think that I’m unhappy, anyway? I am fine—only tired.”

“Oh, sure, of course. It wouldn’t have anything to do with the way you are looking today. Why, you haven’t eaten anything and you don’t seem hardly as preoccupied with your wardrobe and jewelry. I’m sure he must have been quite the man,” he emphasized, with a long pause and a face that said if I didn’t agree with him, it meant he knew me better than I knew myself.

“Wouldn’t you like to think so!” came my awkwardly rude rejoinder. I attempted that sarcastic, hard image that I had never had any difficulty keeping up. Only today it seemed strangely out of place, and I was flapping about like a fish out of water.

“Come now, no need to get like that. I was merely interested—seeing that I was the one who introduced you two. So what next? You will not be seeing him again—am I correct?”

I panicked at that thought. I would have to conquer first, not let some mighty man come and knock me off my high horse and then walk away. No, I would have to get what I wanted. But no desperation would be shown on my face. I tried to appear as nonchalant as ever.

“Why not? He is a nice sort of man, and he has some interesting stories to tell. Perhaps he can

come over again some time, or if there's a party. I don't care."

"Splendid! It just so happens that a cousin of mine, a spice merchant, is visiting from Ur where his goods have brought in a healthy profit. He wants to throw a big party to show off his newfound riches, as it were. You're invited, of course. It's two days from now, at my house. And if word of it gets to Samson, I'm sure he would not miss it, especially if he hears of the good women and wine to be had there. Seems like he is that sort of man," Girad winked, hoping to get a reaction out of me.

"Parties, parties! Two days. So close and so little time to prepare," I said with a pretentious air of boredom. Yet inside I was practically rubbing my dainty fingers together gleefully. I could hardly wait to see him again. "Ah well, I'm sure we'll all have a fine time—and you'll have plenty to get drunk on!" I said as I got up to leave, pulling my robe closer around me, hoping rather to end the conversation on his drunkenness than on me.

Once I turned my back I smiled satisfactorily. *I may just get what I want at last!* I thought.

"Er, yes," Girad mumbled after me and took an awkward look at the wine he was even now drinking, as I walked quickly off.

- 2 -

Unbeknownst to me at the time, after Samson had left my home the night before, he had spent the night in the fields. Sleeping, no; but meditating on his former encounters with Philistine women, namely his former wife. Whilst I had gone to the comfort of my room and lay down on my soft sheets, he had chosen the ground for his bed. He looked up at the stars and talked aloud to his wife, who I soon learned had been killed almost twenty years earlier.

“Lilia,” he whispered, with the tenderness of one who had loved deeply, “I have not forgotten you. Sometimes I wonder what has become of you. Are you, perhaps, one of those bright stars now, looking down upon me from the heavens? Or has your tender soul found favor with God and become one of His messengers, even though you were the daughter of my enemies?” He breathed deeply of the fresh air that surrounded him and thought of his father, who had also passed from this world.

“I never told you this, Lilia, but my father always told me that he could never understand why I could not have found a wife amongst our own people. I was angry with him then, but it seems as though he knew what was best. While I have no regrets for choosing you, my sweet Lilia, your passing brought so much pain to me, and to your sister. At least your

father did not have to stay in this world without you. Perhaps we should never have met?

“And now this woman ... Delilah. She is so fascinating, her beauty so intoxicating ... and yet I felt a strange coldness and apprehension when I was near her for a moment.” Samson sighed deeply.

“Father,” he cried out, “are you trying to warn me of her? Is there some evil to befall me that neither she nor I know of? I think not. Perhaps it is only the memories of Lilia that haunt me. Yet I feel drawn to see Delilah once again.”

After a few moments of waiting—for an answer perhaps—he shifted his mind to other things. Strangely enough, strong as he was in flesh, his spirit could not endure confusion very well, and he shrank from thoughts that would torment him thus. But his mind was on Lilia and his thoughts would not stray far from her, and the turn of events that his marriage to her had led to. There was the riddle she had been forced to divulge, the debt he’d been forced to pay, the men he’d killed to pay it.

Soon enough his memories wandered to that day he discovered that Lilia had been given to another, and when in revenge he had caught the three hundred foxes, tied torches to their tails and burnt wheat fields galore, to the fury of those who owned them.

“Ah,” he said, a small smile of satisfaction creeping about the corners of his mouth. He ran his fingers through his long hair, and rested his head in the palm of his hands. “Those sprightly creatures! I don’t know what came over me that I was able to catch them all. But it seems that’s what I think every time I do that—not catch three hundred foxes, that is, but do something that no other man, fit as he might be, could do.”

He chuckled to himself as he remembered the

one lone fox that had given him the idea. And then he chuckled some more when he remembered how he had had to run after it, and the rest of them. His nimble legs were tired, certainly, but those foxes were challenge enough to keep the pride in him after them. Their squinted eyes, those pointed noses. Those tempting, wicked faces of theirs. Plus, they would make such a beautiful picture, running through the fields, torches on their tails, their fur complementing the entire scene. He remembered as he laughed aloud gleefully when the last fox took off, running fast and furiously from the fire that was fastened to its tail.

Anyone who had done something of that sort, though he would not have been able to do it by himself, would have taken off for some hiding place soon as the evil deed was done. But no, not Samson. He walked slowly to his home, laughing every few minutes. He was angry, yes. He did not do something so destructive merely for sport. But the thought of those foxes darting about, and the horror of those who would come upon such a majestic fire, all that aroused satisfaction that God's vengeance had been justly meted out upon the oppressors of His people.

The last embers of that fire burning in his mind's eye soon dimmed, and Samson was fast asleep.



The next two days flew by faster than I had thought they would. I sent word by a roundabout means to Samson, telling him of the feast, yet making sure it did not come directly from me. After all, as a lady of my reputation I could not appear too desperate. But I was in fact desperate, and would not depend utterly on that broken reed, my drunken friend Girad.

Once the party had begun, there was still no sign of Samson. *He had better come!* I thought to

myself. I was decked out as always, but this time for a purpose other than that of a quick conquest for personal gain—though I am not sure I would have called it love just yet. After the regular pleasantries, and being introduced to Girad's cousin the spice merchant—who I found to be a most disagreeable fellow—the partying began in earnest. Of course, it soon deteriorated to little more than an occasion for drunken revelry, with much loud singing and dancing being among the lighter entertainment options.

Just when I had given up hope and resigned myself to the disgust at watching those humans who, it seemed, had decided unanimously to play the role of a menagerie of beasts, Samson walked in.

He came unannounced, once again catching me off guard. I drew my breath in sharply, but was at once put at ease by his manly presence, especially in the midst of the fools around us. The dim firelight reflecting off his features made him look most pleasing indeed. I smiled inwardly, but kept on my reserved demeanor as I approached him.

I must confess, I was slightly embarrassed to be at this party at this stage of it. I usually seemed to find myself in the company of men, though there were a few women about who seemed to be as intoxicated as the men, though less repulsive in their manner.

I generally had purposed not to drink much in my party life, not wanting to lose my wits or find myself embarrassed the morning after. And when one finds herself in the company of those who are decidedly enjoying the effects of the vast amounts they have drunken, being not drunk herself, it is difficult to participate with the same amount of enthusiasm as the others possess.

But all those feelings aside, I was indeed pleased that Samson had come. I was also glad to

notice that he did not seem to be put off by the revelry of the guests. He had a rather amused look on his face and even looked as though he was eager to join in the festivities, though perhaps not to the same degree as they. In my own way, attempting to analyze the behavior of this curiously attractive man, I imagined that being a judge of Israel was likely a demanding job, perhaps leaving little room for merriment. So I could understand his need to be a man again.

I came to find out that it was not infrequently that he took this pleasure—that is, the pleasure of being a wholehearted man, as it were. But for now this reasoning sufficed, and made me feel a semblance of womanly compassion welling up.

Ah, I felt good. *I understand so well*, I thought, and it seemed that understanding was only a step away from connecting.

Samson looked down at me with a friendly smile, and put his arm around me.

I couldn't help but look down at the muscular arm that was now beside my own comparatively scrawny one. He must have just then caught me staring, for he flexed his muscles and looked straight into my face with a silly grin. I laughed aloud. I figured it was the appropriate response, but I did think it funny and I enjoyed the knowledge that he possessed a sense of humor.

"Ah ... Delilah, was it? I'm glad to see you here. Come let's find some place to sit; then perhaps then I can tell you more stories of some of my ... heroics."

It did not occur to me just then that he had in fact thought about what it was that he could speak to me of without bringing to both of our attention the very obvious (or so he thought) fact that our people were not allies and that he was not neutral.

I smiled at his suggestion. This man was

certainly different tonight. During our previous encounter he had seemed so much more serious and preoccupied. But now I could tell he was ready to play.

He led me over to a couch where he sank in comfortably, in a very relaxed, manly way, not taking heed much to how he landed or anything of the sort. I was preparing myself to sit gracefully in some pose of relaxed perfection, as I always attempted to. So you might picture the surprise on my face when he pulled me down without warning. I practically fell onto the couch. I managed to keep my legs from flying up. That would have made the situation cross the humorous boundary into the embarrassed zone, and I would have flushed.

I despised being embarrassed. As it was now we both let out a hearty laugh—he probably after seeing the shock on my face before I recovered and found it possible to laugh. Seeing me off guard must have brought out a wink of protectiveness in him, for he pulled me playfully closer to his side and his right arm, which sat still around my shoulders, gave my entire upper body a gentle squeeze, for it was that large. I smiled, but then, nestled between his chest (which I instantly admired being so close to) and his arm, I felt quite cozy—like that was where I belonged.

“So now, great hero,” I said with a smirk on my face, once I had reassumed as much of the Delilah in me as I could, “tell me of your exploits.”

“Very well then,” he said, sitting up and leaning his elbows on his knees. “There is the time I rent a lion.”

“Into how many pieces?” I asked, pretending not to be surprised at the feat.

He just laughed. “Enough,” was his reply. There were a few seconds when his smile lingered and I



felt drawn by his eyes. Then, I broke out of my trance and felt uncomfortable about the silence that had ensued.

“That is fascinating, but how about ... tell me about your wife.” I was actually a little surprised at my boldness, and after I had said that I almost regretted it.

Very gently, yet firmly and almost sadly he replied, “Maybe some other time.” Then resuming his previous attitude he continued. “Now, about that lion. It happened like this: I was a young man on my way down to Timnath to...”—he looked at me in reference to my last rash question—“...to be married. It had been a particularly hot and dry spell for about a month or so. It was no wonder then that this young lion had probably been having a difficult time finding prey. So as it happened, I was on the road and at first I didn’t see him. I only heard the roar. It was a deafening sound, one which I hope someone as delicate as you never has to hear.” I smiled flirtatiously at his comment, and he smiled in return, but only for a second before resuming his story.

“I could tell he was hungry, quite possibly angry, and most ferocious. He started for me from up a little higher on an embankment about 20 paces from the path. Now most likely anyone’s natural impulse would have been to start running. However, I started to feel a strange sensation, sort of a power surging in me. I met the lion head-on, and as he reared on his hind legs to make the death spring, I leaped quickly out of his way and hit him in the side of the head with a sharp blow. When he found nothing but air beneath his raking talons this made him most unpleasant. He began for me once again...”

“Unpleasant? You call that simply unpleasant?” I laughed in disbelief.

He smiled as if, of course, that was the most appropriate word for such a horrific situation, and carried on. "Yes. Then he started for me once again, and this time I knew there would be no more toying with him or he might become too powerful through his anger. Quickly darting to the side, I made a leap upon his back and encircled his midsection with my legs. This left my arms free to grab him about the neck, squeezing ever tighter till he was thrashing about in a vain effort to dislodge me.—I'm not boring you am I? Perhaps you would like some more wine?"

I said nothing, but I suppose my wide-eyed fascination revealed that indeed, I was not bored and wine would not be needed to enhance my interest. He smiled amusedly and then leaned back again to finish off his glorious tale.

"Well, from then there's not much more to tell. I just choked him till he died."

I shot him a quizzical glance for having ended his story so poorly. He returned it with a quizzical glance of his own.

I said, "But you have not yet rent him! I thought you said you rent him!"

He sighed. He had obviously told this story before. "Yes, then I rent him. I snapped his neck the way you do when killing a young goat or some other animal. I merely was trying to spare you some of the more distasteful parts of this story. But I see that you certainly have stomach for these sorts of tales, and perhaps I could tell you of times when I have killed things other than lions."

I had not been sheltered from much, and he was certainly right in assuming that I did have the stomach for such tales, but rather than betray the fact that I was perhaps even a little fascinated, I decided to play the part of a lady and not appear too interested in manly things. Then, as I sat

there, silent as a mouse, he casually pulled off the tasseled sash that was tied loosely about my waist, and then put it about his upper arm. I looked at him in shock, and he smiled.

“When I was a boy and first discovered my strength, I used to tie all sorts of rope, strings, veils, about my arms and then...” He flexed and the sash ripped and fell loosely beside me.

“That was my sash!” I said, pretending to be more affected by the fact that it had broken than by the awesome strength I had just seen.

He smiled. “Yes, I know. I’m sure you have many more.”

I did not know my vanity was so apparent, and so I sort of blushed, I suppose.

“But as I grew older, I began to see that it really was not *my* strength. It was mine in that I wielded it, but in truth it was a gift from God that had been bestowed upon me. And that was likely more on account of my parents than because of anything I did or had not done. Were it not for God, I would be an ordinary man, and my strength as any other.”

Then a loud voice called over from the circle of humans-turned-animals for the night. “You there! Strong man from Israel! We hear you do mighty things. Come now and show us some of your strength. We have need of some entertainment!”

“Pay them no mind, Samson, they’re beasts—not much unlike that lion.”

“Yes, not too unlike him. Though without the majesty,” was his rejoinder.

But then another call came from the men, after they had all nearly split their sides laughing at some hideous joke, no doubt. “They say that you killed 30 men in Ashkelon to pay a bet that you lost.”

“Yeah, that’s it!” another man joined in. “That’s when they gave your wife to your best man, wasn’t it?” he taunted.

## BETRAYAL

In that moment I saw him change. He was no longer the happy man he was moments earlier. No, now he was furious. He started towards that group of men with the look of a killer in his eyes. His eyes were so expressive, so demonstrative of how he felt that I could have sworn that the strange sensation he talked about earlier had come to him again. It was in his eyes. It was so tangible that I almost thought for a moment that, in my proximity to him, I had felt it as well.

In spite of my awe, I couldn't let a fight break out, not here as guests, especially him being an Israelite. If the guards were summoned, he would most surely be taken away, so I sprang up to stop him. I had not entirely grasped the extent of his strength to remember that the guards would likely also find themselves at the same fate as these men.

"Samson, Samson, please! Mind them not, they are but fools and have not the slightest mind to what their tongues speak! I pray you, come, let's go outside. It's cooler out there."

For a moment it seemed as though he would not listen, but soon enough the expression on his face changed, much to my relief.

"All right," he said, wiping the beads of sweat that had formed on his brow. I took him by the hand and led him down the steps out to a part of the garden before the men could say another word to change his mind.

Once we were out of the house, I thought to ask him more about his wife—since those fools had uttered enough already to arouse my curiosity and also my sympathy. My mouth opened in agreement with my thoughts, but the words that came out weren't about his wife, thankfully, for who knows what type of reaction a thoughtless continuance of that sensitive topic might have invited.

“So nice out here, such a beautiful starry sky. A stark difference indeed from the drunken atmosphere of the party in there,” I chattered.

Great was my surprise when his fingertips found their way to my lips and silenced me thus. I wished I would have puckered my lips softly and kissed each of his fingers while they conveniently rested against my lips for that split second. But for the first time in my adult life I was unsure of myself, or how he would interpret it. I cared what he thought of me. I wanted him to think highly of me. Yet it was a struggle, for I also, the sensual woman that I was, longed so much to know him in a more intimate manner—and whenever I wanted something, I wanted it immediately and was used to getting it. But I would not for the world appear to be desperate. So his fingertips came and went from my lips without event.

And so we stood in silent reverence of the majesty of the stars and the vastness of the sky. Such an activity I was not accustomed to engaging in, but it appeared to do good to my soul, for at length I felt a great deal more peaceful. So peaceful, in fact, that I acquiesced to the fact that this night would probably be an uneventful one. And soon enough, when the peace started to turn into boredom—for I had learned not the art of meditating, and had not many pleasant memories to review in such silence—I fidgeted a little.

“Samson, I think that I should be returning home now. It is so very early in the morning,” I said, and laughed, a little embarrassed. I don’t know why. “I think the morning star will soon be outshining all others. I should get some rest.”

That seemed to settle things between us as far as I was concerned. It made me feel that I had not been denied his company, and he could take all the time in the world to come to the point I was

now at. I turned to go, and found that I began walking against the wind. I wrapped my cape about my shoulders tighter, and made my way.

“Will you go home alone?” came that voice I had already grown fond of.

“It is no problem,” I answered. “My friend Girad and the others are all...”

But before I could finish the sentence, he offered, “I can walk you home.” And then he added in jest, “It is the least I can do in return for your sash.”

My eyes instinctively batted coquettishly at this sudden cause for hope. “Very well then, if you wish to pay your debt,” I said, playing along with the reference to my sash, yet hoping with all my heart that the payment would come to more than merely that.

He laughed his gentle male laugh and caught up to me in a couple of strides. He seemed somber enough as we walked, and I wondered where his thoughts were. Hard as I tried to read him, I could not know for sure what lay ahead of us that night.

“Maybe you’ll have to fight another lion for me on the way,” I teased.

“Then I guess you’d better not get too far away from me,” he answered, and slipped his arm around my waist to draw me closer.

After about half an hour we arrived at my home. The house was quiet and my servants slept. “Won’t you come in?” I asked, trying my best to appear only courteous and hide my ulterior motives.

He smiled a smile that I wasn’t sure was either knowing or simply teasing, and said, “Oh no, it’s all right. You wanted some sleep before the morning star disappeared. Don’t bother yourself with me,” and then he kissed my hand. I closed my eyes to revel in this simple act of affection,

and when I opened them, I found him wearing what I thought was a slight smirk on his face. Or perhaps it was the shadows. He thanked me for the evening, turned on his heel and left.

*Curious fellow*, I thought as I gathered up my long skirts and walked up the steps to the front door. The thought crossed my mind that he knew more than I how to make one want desperately, but I brushed it aside.

I had scarcely made it to the top of the steps when I heard footsteps behind me. I turned and saw Samson standing there. With a slightly embarrassed tone, yet full of passion, he spoke. "I cannot leave just yet. May I come in?"

That was all it took. I threw myself into his arms and kissed him, not taking a moment to wonder what his reaction would be. And indeed I did not have to wonder, for assurance had come quickly. His arms were wrapped securely about my slender waist, and his lips returned the kisses just as ardently.

I let him take it from there. He gathered me up in his strong arms and carried me up the steps. Once we had entered the front door, between kisses I managed to whisper, "The room at the end of the hall." He carried me there and pushed the door open with a nudge of his fingers. He laid me down on the bed then lay himself down beside me and began to kiss me once again. I just lay back and enjoyed this moment of pleasure as I confirmed that indeed there was no mistaking his having been a man of the ladies, for his touch was gentle yet firm and I only had to follow.

He gently began to remove my prized garments so carefully chosen for this event. Then, once he had disrobed me entirely, his lips began their exploration in earnest. First, he pulled from off my face any strands of hair that had fallen carelessly

## BETRAYAL

there, and kissed my forehead, my lips, my neck, and then moved to my breasts, my stomach.

I ran my fingers through his long hair, and undid the tie that held it in one bundle. It came down over his shoulders, caressing my body like another set of hands. No longer able to lie there peacefully I pushed him down, climbed atop him and began to remove his clothes with much less care and precision than he had treated mine. After all, I was sure a man of his strength could take it.

There is no need to explain the rest of the occasion, save that it was the most delightful I think I had ever experienced till then. And how I hoped that it was merely the beginning of a series of similar events!

At the end, he lay me down on my back while he looked at my face and figure, which were bathed in the pale light of the early morning stars and the remainder of moonlight that flooded through a nearby window. As he lay me down I felt almost as a baby would feel, securely cradled, overpowered even, by the affections of someone who had it within him to protect my very being. And even when it was all over for the night, he did not simply roll over and begin a solo of snoring, like other men that had shared my bed with me had often done. Instead he lay there, twirling my hair in his strong fingers, kissing me all over, even taking my feet in his hands and stroking them. So relaxed I felt, so warm, so peaceful. He would watch over me these hours, I knew.

And so it seems that, in this ecstasy, I must have fallen to sleep in his arms, for the next time I looked into his face, it was bathed in the morning sunlight.



He was still there when I awoke, only he did not seem to be entirely at peace. I wondered if I



had lowered myself in his eyes by allowing this intimate contact.

“We are not at peace, our two peoples,” he mused aloud. “Your lords are the oppressors of my people. They hold us in cruel bondage and lord their authority over us and make us to be no more than their cattle and servants. I am sent by God to deliver His people, and yet here I love a woman of our enemies. And it is not the first time.”

I quickly pulled the covers over me as if that would cover not only my physical nakedness, but also that of my mind. I had quite laid aside my wits the night earlier, and was in no wise prepared for such honesty. But I decided to play the girl, even though inside, his having made me feel so uncomfortable made me quite angry.

“Oh, but cannot we two be as normal people? Cannot we two love and leave the skirmishes of our people aside for those moments?” Yet even as I spoke the words I somehow knew what the answer was in my heart. I began to think then less as a woman in love and more as a Philistine whose people had been affronted and discomfited by this man. But all the while I did not want to put him from my eyes, nor my heart. I feared that I was most likely as torn as Samson was.

He looked at me and could not find an appropriate answer. But his look told me that my earlier supposition was right. He could not see how it could work. He had an obligation to be true to his people. His heart had been hurt once before by a woman of my people. He, unlike myself, *did* know loyalty, albeit in his own particular way. He arose, put on his garment, then picked up his cloak and held it in his hands.

“I am sorry. I do not have the words to say at this moment. But I have bared my heart just now, for I feel that I owe nothing less to you for allowing

me into your close confidence so quickly." And then he reached for my hand and kissed it. "Perhaps we shall meet again, and we can pray God finds us a way to love."

I wanted to snatch my hand out of his grasp, but a man of strength like his was demands a certain amount of respect. And I was so enamored with him that—angry as I was, betrayed as I felt by this rejection—I would not completely cut him off. And once he left I threw my head back down upon the bed.

*What a fool I was, I chided myself. Such bliss as I thought was only the beginning of the greatest I had known could not have been without some great price. Oh, what a fool you have hidden inside of you, Delilah!*

I reviewed the brief exchange in my mind a thousand times that morning. *God?! I exclaimed within at my remembrance of his prayer that God would find us a way to love—as if any gods ever did anything for us mortals! Somehow I felt that I had been too rash, but Who was the Almighty that He would spend a moment to teach me, one mortal in countless thousands, that lesson in person just then? I could not tell.*

Had He sent my Samson, a mark of great strength and power, to reserve a place in my heart in hopes that it would lead me to Him?



The weeks fled by. Perhaps they even turned to months. I can't remember. But Samson often paid a visit to the chambers of my mind, and there the memories sweet flooded my heart and overflowed on my lips. I closed my eyes and remembered how it felt to know that he was using the whole of his strength to love me that one early morning. But then that smile that had teased the corners of my lips at those memories would fade

and be replaced by a frown when I remembered how he had left me.—How his love for his people and his loyalty to that which his God had called him to do, to free his people from my people, was stronger than his personal desire for me.

It was one of these days that my lips played the game of forming their curious beauty into whatever expression my inner soul commanded them. I played with the goblet of wine held so delicately between my fingers, as Girad engaged in his nigh perpetual intercourse with that love of his, drink. Every now and then I took a sip of wine, and as my lips met the rim of the goblet I would look up at my friend—who I thought would have drunk enough to fill a lake and surely should soon be on his way—having nothing much else to do since I was in no mood for conversing.

“Ah! And to think that some are so prudish that they won’t let their bodies revel in the pleasure of wine!” Girad slurred satisfactorily, putting the cup to his lips yet again for a brief moment before breaking out into a big grin when he saw the disdainful expression on my face.

He laughed. “Come now, woman! Cannot a man enjoy himself, even though you obviously cannot at this time?”

I sat up lazily, crossed one leg over the other and leaned forward. “Perhaps I do not have to stoop to such animalistic behavior to enjoy myself,” I snapped.

Girad was too happy to be bothered. He always seemed that way. I marveled at how it didn’t seem to matter to him that his breath smelled so strongly of the wine that I’d been so indulgent to let him have as much as he wanted of, or that he’d managed in all his revelry—and not even at a party mind you, just in my presence—to let some of it spill onto his rich garments, no doubt spoiling

them; worse yet that he looked like quite the fool in the presence of a lady. I shook my head. What an odd creature! And how could such a one be blessed to look so comely?

The thought slipped out of my lips. "Good friend," I said with a sly smile, "I think God would have done better to give your comeliness to someone else who would take better care of it."

"Which god did you say?" he said out of the corner of his mouth, while the other corner appeared to prepare itself for the consumption of fruit.

I thought for a moment. *Did I say God? Surely I must have meant...* No, I had to admit, thinking about Samson all this time, I had come to refer to God as what He indeed was, *the* God. It had been some time since I had paid tribute to my other gods—but then, I had never considered myself a particularly religious woman. I decided to get up and leave.

"Oh no, don't leave me yet. I rather like the sight of you across from me."

"Quite perfects your drunken heaven, doesn't it? I'm sorry. I have other things to do."

"I hear Samson has returned to the Valley of Sorek yet again, to make his majestic appearance," Girad slurred with the biggest smile on his face, as if he had just given me something I had longed for. And of a truth he had—at least he'd put me within reach of it. But just before all my instincts caused me to involuntarily leap about in a girlish fashion, the proud Delilah checked them. I had been rejected once. There was no reason to dance and leap about; he would likely not see me anyway.

"Did I say something?"

I cut Girad off there. "Oh, I'm sorry," I said with a poorly acted smile of embarrassment. "My mind was

elsewhere. What were you saying now? Oh yes, that Samson had returned. Well, that's nice."

"Well," came his knowing look that I should have expected. "Shall I invite him over? Maybe you would like to have him for dinner, or..."

"Oh no, no. I'm quite busy. Besides, it's not as though we're lovers or anything. He's an Israelite and I'm a Philistine. We cannot get too intimate," I said with a simple wave of my hand as I turned and walked towards the door of the room, leaving Girad with a puzzled look. I turned around and looked over my shoulder at him, then turned fully around, placing my hands upward on either side of the doorframe.

"I wouldn't want to betray my people," I said, looking him squarely in the eye.

Somehow that made me feel better, as if I were the one who had obligations, not Samson. That was entirely an untruth, of course, for my sole obligation in life had been the pursuit of my own happiness, wealth, popularity and well-being.

Girad did seem puzzled at this unusual expression of loyalty to my country and people, but he just shook his head. *Isn't life a great contradiction anyway?* he thought to himself. Never mind my reaction, Girad decided he would do me the favor of bringing Samson anyway.



"Foolish, foolish, foolish man you are!" I said. My maid tried to comb my long hair while I shook my head and ranted at Girad. "The way you impose upon me and disrupt my schedule!" I *was* angry, but not for the reasons I had mentioned. With a little flick of my wrist, I motioned for my maid to leave. She meekly bowed her head and scurried out, relieved at the thought of being dismissed from my presence, with the vile mood that I was in.

I walked straight up to Girad, who did not flinch,

nor did he attempt to don the same ill countenance as I wore. Keeping a bemused look on his face, he raised his eyebrows in the manner one does when they do not find something quite as enormously important as you do.

I continued. "I was going to invite the governor over for a dinner party! I was in fact that very moment making plans, before you walked in. And now look what you've done! You invited that Israelite over here, without my permission, and when I had already told you last week that I was too busy!"

A beam of insight must have struck Girad, for he looked clearly into my eyes and said, "No, no, dear. I don't think you mind missing a dinner with that fat governor of ours." A slight smile crept across his face and he took his forefinger and tapped it gently on the tip of my nose. "I think that *that* Israelite has offended you," he said with utmost confidence. "Perhaps that strength of his that so allured you at first, afterwards overpowered you, and left you feeling more helpless than you would have liked!" Then the clear insight that he possessed and expressed so confidently for a moment left, and all that was left standing before me was the casual hedonist of a rich man's son that I knew. Only he was not drunk today.

"Well now, I don't know what he did to you, but don't tell me, because it might bring out my protective instincts—only I don't think I could defend you against him very well. Come to think of it, he would make you a good protector, you must admit. And, my girl, you must show a little respect to someone who, in truth, is greater and stronger than yourself—definitely as concerns bodily strength, eh? Though apparently otherwise as well."

I shot a nasty look at him.

He continued, undisturbed, "Well, either that, or you must find out how to strip him of that strength, and find his weakness. Either one. But do not run and hide, nurturing little feelings of anger and offense. It only makes you weaker." With that he bowed graciously. "And now I must be gone, for my love awaits me..." I raised an interested eyebrow as if to say, "What love?" My hopeful curiosity, and the eyebrow that had honestly displayed it quickly died down when I heard his response.

"Why, wine, of course. We have a perpetual love affair, and great need of each other, mmm," he mocked as he walked away.

I rolled my eyes in disgust. *Of course. That beast will never find a lover*, I thought with utter contempt. Then my thoughts turned towards the visitor that was coming that afternoon. Samson.

Like it or not, I had an obligation to beautify myself. After all, image was of great importance to me. So I called my maid back to finish adorning me. I looked down at the garments I was wearing. So soft, so pale, naïve—not at all the picture that I wanted to portray.

"Jeila, get me something else to wear. I don't like this one at all."

"Did you have anything in mind, mistress?"

"Where is that black garment I wore last time Ekkor hosted a party?"

She quickly produced the garment and I held it up against my body.

"Ah yes, much better."

"Would you like to wear the leopard skin as well?"

"Hmmm, no. That was just for Ekkor. He likes it, you know. Just this will do, with that gold-ornamented belt."

In no time Jeila had brought the belt and all

the accessories to go along with my outfit, and I was dressed. I was pleased with Jeila. She had done very well in giving me the image I wanted to portray that night—not the meek girl that I had played before, but this time a little wiser, a little harder and less vulnerable. I would not leave myself open for another rejection, I resolved.

“Jeila, it’s been some time since you visited your mother, hasn’t it?”

She nodded meekly.

“Well then, here.” I went to fetch some money from a purse beside my bed. “Go have yourself a splendid time, and give her some of these as well.” I dropped a few more coins into her palm. She looked up at me with delight.

“You will be needing no assistance before...”

“I shall ready my own self for bed, no need to worry.” I smiled kindly and patted her shoulder. “Off now! Go have a joyous time.”

She skipped out, overcome with happiness.

I felt very charitable inside. I was not the evil mistress that some had thought I was; after all, I was being so kind to my favorite maid. This simple deed put me in quite good spirits. So did the next thought that strangely enough had not occurred to me earlier.

*Perhaps Samson has weakened after all. I would have thought he should refuse. Meeting me accidentally at a party is one thing, but Girad invited him to my house and he accepted!* For a moment I contemplated the garments I had chosen, and reconsidered my desire to appear as a wise woman of the world that night instead of the innocent one that my frame and features alone suggested. But I brushed the thought to the side.

*We cannot change our whole strategy on account of a simple, wishful thought, now, I reminded myself. Besides, Jeila is gone and I don’t think I could*



*do myself justice like she can.* My thoughts began to confirm my feelings as I looked down and inspected the garments on myself as best as I could.

*Oh, and this is quite a lovely choice,* I thought, admiring the material that was loosely and openly woven—at least in some places, it seemed—and sticking a fair leg gracefully out of an opening in the dress. I ran my hands along the front of the dress, repositioning the way some of the revealing material fell across my upper half. Then my eyes followed my figure down to the belt. I smiled in approval. I stretched my foot out and pointed my toes gracefully while I admired the anklet that sat so nicely at the base of my leg. I turned my head and looked satisfactorily at the faint outline of my other leg still hidden behind the length of the dress.

I closed my eyes and imagined Samson coming behind me while I was in this graceful position, wrapping his arms around me and revealing a small bouquet of wild flowers that he had picked especially for me. The delicacy of the flowers contrasted so wonderfully with his strong, muscular body. Oh, he was the paragon of mannishness! And that in his manliness he had found time to think of me, and to do something so out of character—for me—made me feel so womanly, so loved.

I imagined how I took the flowers, lifted them to my face, closed my eyes and smelled them. I imagined feeling his strong fingers take the flowers from my hands and letting them fall gracefully to the ground. For a moment I watched in my mind's eye as the flowers fell in slow motion to the ground, and I wondered at his action, but only for a moment. The next moment he took my hands and put them up over my head and behind his neck, stroking the back of his neck and letting

my fingers explore that mane of his. His hands came around the front of my body and freely roamed, until one hand, at impulse almost, went down and pulled the opening of my dress up higher, stroking the remainder of leg that was still hidden from plain view.

Just when my imaginations would have suggested that it was time to move on to more intimate interactions, I heard Girad's voice down the hall, talking to someone. It was Samson. I was thankful they were not in sight of me, and therefore I had no need to blush or even be aggravated that they had caught me in such hopeful, ecstatic fantasy. But the little adventure I had sent myself on paled my memories of his rejection, and somehow I thought there was yet some hope of contrition on his part. And so I decided not to be too haughty this time.

*Tread carefully, Delilah,* I admonished myself. *You know not his intentions, or what his thoughts toward you are. Do not give yourself away.* Having just about approached the garden porch where Samson and I had first met, I finished the brief speech to myself and held my breath a moment.

Sensing my presence, the men turned around. It seemed for a moment that my eyes locked with Samson's, as if each was trying to know—not by superficial means, but by a peek into each other's inner soul—what the other was thinking. Our last meeting had been so dramatic, so pivotal, it would seem. What now? But his eyes...! I had the most difficulty pulling myself away from the penetrating gaze of his.

"I did not expect you would be free to visit these parts so soon, so you can imagine my surprise when Girad told me he had invited you," I said quickly, hoping to put forth some sort of message within these casual lines.

"I was as surprised to be invited," he responded kindly. "But, you have a wonderful selection of fruit, and your house is so beautiful I could not resist," he continued with the beginnings of a smirk on his face, as if he understood my little message and thought to respond in a similarly cryptic fashion.

There was a pause that only two souls who have been or are intimate can fully understand, and during that pause Girad felt rather out of place. And so it was he who broke the pregnant silence.

"Ah well, let us go for dinner. I hear it is a splendid meal that awaits us. And of course," he added with a wink, and I think he said all this in an attempt to put a casual blanket upon the evening, "there must be good wine! You know how we do get along!"

"Yes, I know," I said, between somewhat clenched teeth. I didn't like him joking about his inordinate appetite for wine in front of guests. It made me look like I entertained fools in my house.

Girad walked ahead of us, congratulating the servant who was putting the last garnishes on the table.

"Your friend Girad is quite a pleasant man," Samson remarked. "I enjoy him a good deal." I wondered that moment if he had sensed my disapproval of Girad's forthright jesting about his weakness for strong drink, and sought to relax me. Even if he hadn't, it worked quite nicely. I heaved an inner sigh of relief and remembered that I needn't be so apprehensive.

Samson and I soon reached the table where Girad had already seated himself at one end of the small table elegantly decorated with finely cooked and beautifully presented foods. I sat myself directly opposite Girad, and Samson sat down on the side between us.

There was a small pause before we began eating, and it seemed as if Samson was thinking of something else. And he was indeed. He closed his eyes a brief moment and his pleasant voice said, "Lord God, we thank You for the kindness of these hosts, and for the food You have given us." It was nothing short of a prayer, but somehow the tone of his voice was so tender, so human. Perhaps even slightly vulnerable. It was this odd combination of traits that confused me at times. He smiled afterwards, and Girad and I smiled in return.

"Does not your god have a name?" Girad asked curiously a few moments later, as he helped himself to the rich meat dish that was his favorite. "Lord God' does seem rather general ... at least to me." He added the last part quickly when he looked up and saw my blank stare, and wondered if I didn't approve of his question. He was not mocking, merely asking.

"Oh yes, there are many names for Him, indeed," Samson replied, dipping his flat bread into a bowl of sauce.

"Ah, well that is most excellent. I think that every god should have a number of names then, for after all, we mortals have but one, and since they are higher than us, perhaps they should also have more names," Girad replied casually.

I gave him a soft kick under the table, not wanting to prompt Samson to any sort of preaching on the "one God" issue. I felt uncomfortable when the topic of conversation would reach a loftier or more spiritual plane, for that was quite out of my realm.

"Girad, have you heard any of Samson's tales?" I asked with girlish pride. "He told me one. It was amazing!" I looked quickly to the side at Samson, to see if I might read his inner reaction. He was,

of course, a man, and would not be ashamed of such feats, I imagined. Yet again, in my admiration for him I felt most vulnerably concerned of what he thought of my actions and words, and so I could not be sure.

Samson smiled and took a great swig of wine.

“Oh no, I don’t think I’ve heard one from you yourself, Samson,” Girad said as he looked down at his plate, wiping the meat sauce with the last piece of flat bread that he habitually tore into many pieces at the beginning of the meal. “This dinner is awfully quiet. We could use a little excitement,” he added, looking up to see if I would be offended at his insinuation that the evening was somewhat boring to him. I didn’t care.

Samson leaned back in his seat and laid the entire length of his forearms on the table in a relaxed fashion. “I suppose I could tell you one,” he smiled. For a moment I thought there was a slight sign of embarrassment, and I giggled inwardly at any sign of emotion from him. Perhaps it made me feel more in touch with him, that he in all his might and strength was not too high even for me. And though I would not admit it, I did consider myself on a level not quite as high as he. I had no loyalties, save to myself. I had no inner convictions that I would risk my life for. And so while I sometimes admired him, and sometimes hated him for making me feel less than he, I was always in awe.

But I had not detected entirely accurately. I later discovered that the reason for this hesitation which he showed at times was not merely because of an awkwardness as to how to tell such stories of his own strength and might, but because they *had* actually been given to him by God. I did not comprehend that, and thought surely his insistence of this strength being a gift from God was an

Israelite gesture of modesty. Most of his exploits were in fact against our own people, a realization that had somehow not dawned upon Girad or myself just yet.

We had once been in the hubbub of activity—especially, as one of Ekkor's loyal subjects. At that time I was very young in the ways of the world and eager to do his bidding in order that I might have success and all that he had promised me. But my success gave me great pride—far too much pride—and the men I courted for him in turn courted my independence against him, until I began to expect and then demand my own rewards, and eventually rebel against Ekkor's schemes.

He somehow managed to wink at my behavior, after which I found myself living my own life in the house he had given me, acquiring my living not by thieving, as Ekkor oft had me do, but by casting my feigned affections upon my helpless subjects, so that they would willingly *give* the portion I desired of them. And when it had been given, I would leave them in the dust. I was surprised that Samson had not heard of me from before, but I supposed that his interest in Philistine gossip was as limited as my interest in the world of male politics—where *his* deeds were still distinctly remembered.

Samson cleared his throat before beginning. Then he laughed. "No. I cannot do this. Perhaps you could tell me some story of your own. Girad?"

"No, no, I am not much of a storyteller," he said.

I laughed along with him. He was right; he was a poor storyteller.

"Delilah?" Samson asked. His eyes looked into mine, and I wondered for a moment if he was trying to pull out the "colorful" history my time of service to Ekkor had been. I was tempted to get angry that he made me ashamed of something about myself,

but somehow he drew out the very sweetness in me when he looked into my eyes, and I could only feel at that moment that he was the nicest man that had ever come into my life. All those feelings of rejection that had enraged me so before, or had confused me, were nowhere to be found this instant. Rather than let my eyes reveal all, I looked down, abashed.

“I have no stories, not much has happened in my short life,” I said.

I think that if the air had been more conducive, Girad would have laughed aloud. This was so far from the truth, but how could I tell a man that I truly could have said I was beginning to feel love for, how I had cheated not a few others by feigning love. Would he ever trust me again?

Girad did not feel that comfortable, I imagine, because he was not drinking nearly as much as he normally did. Much as he loved to drink, I assume he also realized about the same time I did and by the same evidence I did that he would be enjoying himself more elsewhere, and so he excused himself.

The silence that followed should have been an awkward one, but instead it was peaceful—for the mind at least. My body was not used to the lack of activity, or perhaps the lack of interactivity. I was used to either being entertained or entertaining. But neither was happening at this moment. My fingers became an outlet for my energy as I waited. They tapped in a cascading sort of rhythm on the surface of the table. Not harshly or impatiently, but just gently. The cool evening breeze wafted through the room every now and then. Samson did not seem to have a problem at all with this quietness. In fact, he seemed to be thinking of something else.

I wondered at that moment what he was like

when he was with others. It dawned on me that I had been with him only twice before, and the others at the party did not interact much with him, except to anger him. My mind traveled here and there, exploring possibilities of how he was with pleasant men folk.

At length I wanted to say something to him, to reach out to him somehow. To apologize that I was not one of his people, to apologize that my love could not make up the difference of nationality. Foolish girl that I was, I had forgotten that my people oppressed his people, and that out of love for those he was born among, and out of obedience to God's purpose for his being, his life was dedicated to freeing his people from the clutches of their oppressors—my people.

Suddenly I was startled. He had put his hand on my knee to get my attention. We both started laughing. I had no idea that my eyes had traveled far away, representative of where my mind was at the moment. I was embarrassed.

“Delilah, there is something I must tell you.”

My green eyes looked deep into his. There was no need for me to answer; I knew he could tell from my expression that I wanted so much to hear it. A part of me out of pride wanted him to apologize for rejecting me, to tell me he was rash, he was wrong, that really and truly there could be love between us. And then another part of me experienced a great desire to show him that I did understand his predicament. I had never felt like that before.

“What I told you that one morning...”

I nodded, waiting for the next words. It was almost as if everything went silent and I only saw his lips moving. It seemed as though his words spoke not to my ears, yet I heard every word in my mind.



“You must understand, it is not because I do not care for you. I ... I do love you—on my heart I promise that I do. It is my people. I must free my people. I cannot fail my God. This is why He gave me such strength.”

His speech was halting, as if he pondered much over every word. I was patient; I waited for each word to be spoken. I was with him because I had opened my heart, had hoped for true love and had seen it. And every moment that this love seemed within reach, my frivolous, haughty self would be laid aside for a time. And each time I thought it might be forever.

I so loved everything about him, vain and sincere—I loved the idea of being with such a strong and comely man. I loved his body. Yet also, I loved how he loved. I respected his devotion to something greater than the convictions I knew, and that respect I sometimes loved and sometimes hated. I loved it for what it made me want; it made me want to reach for higher things, purer things. And I hated it because I knew that it exposed my selfish heart for all its shallowness and greed.

I was so confused. How could I love and hate at the same time, or in such a short time love again something that only days earlier I had hated? Yet the words that I spoke next came from the very depths of my heart; they escaped my lips unchecked. But perhaps it was this that opened his heart up to me again, if it had ever completely closed. They were the most sincere words I think I had ever allowed myself to speak as a grown woman, words that the tender, accepting look in Samson’s eyes drew out of me.

“I cannot change the fact that I am a Philistine, a thing which is a trifle to me, a detail of my being that I would change in a moment if it would allow you to love me, Samson. I wish that your peace

was my peace, that every night I could know that our people were one and the same, and that you would be ever there. ..." I was surprised at the words that came out of my mouth. I would have drawn back and let the remainder of purity and innocence in me be locked up for good, but I had no time for the war that my body and my mind would engage in if I allowed them to, especially with one like me, who was not used to dealing with such powerful emotions as I felt for Samson.

His hand softly, but firmly placed itself around the back of my neck and drew me towards him.

As he had done before, and as I so loved for him to do, he took me up in his arms, all the while kissing me passionately, and took me to my chambers where our bodies had last loved each other so well.

I fell asleep that night, my head resting on his arm. Somehow for that little bit of time the conflict that had raged inside me had ceased. I slept peacefully. But Samson lay awake.

His mind wandered to the time he had gone to Gaza. Lonesome and in need of some womanly company—intimate company, that is—he had gone to see a woman of the night. Word had spread that the enemy of the Philistines, Samson, lay with a woman in the city. Expecting him to stay all the night with her, they lay wait at the city gates, men posted about, hoping to catch this fierce warrior who used such untraditional means of fighting.

Samson chuckled and shook his head. I awoke. Not seeing that he was awake, I lay quietly and looked out my window at the moon high and full.

Samson's thoughts were also on a full moon. He remembered how at midnight, after he had paid the harlot her due, he had looked out at the full moon and known that all was not right. Yet he did not fear. How could a man, who had slain a

thousand fully armored men with but the jawbone of an ass, fear for his life? He had been sent by God to deliver His children, and he would be provided with the necessary strength.

He sighed as he remembered walking out in the moonlight, imagining what sort of ambush they would try this time. Though relaxed and fulfilled by his recent activities, he was none too dull to notice the shadows of the men—more than the regular city watchmen, that stood or sat alongside the city walls; unsuspecting, in that they waited till dawn for him to make his appearance. *A man need not sleep with a harlot, only lay with her*, he remembered thinking with amusement.

Soon enough I fell asleep again, so relaxed and safe I felt lying so close beside him. Samson did not sleep till he had finished his mental review of the entire scene.

And while I dreamt a thousand dreams of no consequence, Samson smiled and relived the feelings he had felt when he carried off those city gates of Gaza. *Nasty old gates, those were*, he thought to himself. *When I reached the hill just before Hebron, where I left them to go on to the next stage of usefulness—either being re-erected as the city gates, with much reconstruction, or being used for a whole neighborhood's firewood—I was very tired of them. I had dust and splinters and deep impressions from the bolts on my arms. I was furious at those Philistines for irritating me so. I could have walked peacefully to my next destination, but they provoked me to carry the gates!*

One can only imagine the surprise that struck those who lay in wait for him, dumb and paralyzed as the posts and the doors of the city gates—yes, even the bars themselves—were uprooted from their residence of years gone by, by a single man who had merely bent his knees and lifted them as

easily as a man lifts a single piece of timber.

For the darkness of the night they could not see how wroth he was with them. Yet he was not in the mood for any killing. He merely wanted to be on his way. Pestered by their folly, he decided that the better choice would be to pick up the city gates.

Normally Samson was an ill-tempered fellow. He loved women and seemed like the most pleasant and charming individual around them, but he was not tolerant of disruptions to his plans—especially if the Philistines were the initiators of them. But how could I have known?—Not only was I a woman, but I had only known him a short while, and in that time had engaged in a battle of charm—or so I thought. Or perhaps we were both drawn to each other and did what only came naturally. Then again, in only two short meetings he had managed already to offend me. Now it seemed that everything was all right again, but I could not be sure. I would not be humiliated again.

I was not sure how long we could sustain such intimacy, before one would deal the other a blow to the heart. Yet I thought to enjoy it thoroughly. The idea of us—aside from his first offence, which I thought I had forgiven him for, but truly had only conveniently forgotten about—enticed me so that I could not resist it. I could not resist the flattery of his love for me. This man, so unlike other men, so strong like no other man had been, who, it seemed, could have any woman he wanted, had set his eyes upon me. Even after rejecting me once for his people, he had now found me so alluring that he had come again, to settle some sort of compromise, that we might love on the side while he yet served his people.

This was the unspoken agreement as I saw it. And so I merely enjoyed our times together. I did

not wish to provoke him to humiliate me again, for I knew too well that he had the strength within him to do it—that is, if I played out my normal strategy. If I ever wanted to overpower him, I would have to play some other way. Even Girad had told me that. But I didn't want to overpower him. That was what I loved about him—he was stronger than I; of course not only in the sense of strength, for all men were stronger than I. But in the sense of his whole being, he was, it seemed, a step ahead. Perhaps it was only because in my confusion and emotion and lack of loyalty to anything or anyone but myself, I lagged behind.

The night came and went. Only this morning Samson did not greet me as he had that other morning, with a full-fisted blow to my ego. He was warm and kind, and seemed to have found some comfortable level of compromise, and for the moment, so had I. It seemed I truly did love him; I, Delilah, who Master Ekkor had once proclaimed incapable of true love, yet every bit able to feign it—perhaps better than some who were capable of the greatest love. Master Ekkor always praised me highly for keeping my wits about me. What would he think of me now? Never mind that. I hated Ekkor for what he had done to me.

For the time being, I would forget all the things that depressed me about myself—my history with Master Ekkor, my frivolous and purposeless life, that unforgettable discussion with Samson about his people versus my people. I forgot all of that and was happy for a moment of peace, however short it would be.



- 3 -

Ignorance is truly bliss, for there were a great many things that I knew not—but came to know much later—that would tear my presently happy heart in two.

A Philistine lord, Nor, had approached Ekkor, the stout, conniving man who I was never proud to have served, hoping to scheme some plot against Samson. Samson had, among other atrocities, killed a thousand armed soldiers—soldiers of our great country, with nothing but the jawbone of a mere ass. Not only was the aspect of defeat by one man terribly humiliating, but even more so, his weapon of choice. Since that time, he had been a wanted man, and the Philistine lords had continued to seek their opportunity to defeat him by any means that they could.

Ekkor sat comfortably, drink in hand, in a large chair. Nor was opposite him, proud and of strong build. “So now, what is it you would have me do for you, my good friend?” Ekkor began.

Ekkor was a king in his own world, and he acted that way. He felt himself, or at least acted, as if he was on the same level as any lord or noble. His thin gray and black beard was neat, and his oiled hair was pulled back. With his simple but fine clothes he always wore a great amount of jewelry, and a large ring on nearly every other finger. He

profited greatly from his investments, which were not always the most honest. Invariably, someone would be cheated in Ekkor's deals, and it was not Ekkor.

On the surface he was a wealthy merchant, a distant relative of another Philistine lord—but also related to me. On the side he had not too few shady endeavors going, and that was where I had often come in. His keen training and my love for money had made me a dependable cohort—that is, until I began defying him.

The fiery-eyed Philistine lord grimaced at the sight of this occasion. He, so tall and proud, strong and powerful, was asking for help from short, fat Ekkor. But Ekkor was efficient, and it was extremely important to do something about Samson.

"Well, Ekkor, my friend," he said in as kind a voice as he could manage, not wanting to offend Ekkor by exposing his true thoughts about him and his activities, "there's been news of that Israelite criminal, Samson."

"Ah, yes, I know of him!" Ekkor replied, putting his drink down on the table. He stroked his beard with his fat hands, while his eyes rolled to the left, trying to remember when he had last heard of him.

Nor continued, "He is an elusive man, but reports have reached us that he has repeatedly been seen here of late, in the Valley of Sorek. If you have heard even half of what this man in his strength has done against our people, you will know that it is imperative that we capture him, if not kill him."

"But surely there must be a way to convert him over to our side, to help us win battles against other enemies—if not his own people?" Ekkor offered hopefully.



“No, no,” Nor sighed. “He won’t do that! Before we can think of what we shall do *once* we find him, we have to know *where* to find him. You have authority in these parts. Do you know of anything?”

Ekkor smiled. “Perhaps an advance payment would help your case?”

“Very well then. We were prepared with something,” Nor said with a sigh, tossing a small purse of silver Ekkor’s way.

Ekkor grinned, knowing Nor must have hoped he wouldn’t have asked, so that Nor could have pocketed the money himself.

Ekkor finished grinning and then looked at Nor. “I shall look into the matter, and provide you with all the information you shall need.”

“Do that, Ekkor, and I’ll give you your first decent payment.”

Ekkor’s eyes lit up at that, and he felt a great deal more friendly and cooperative with this lord. “Isn’t this Samson the one that some say was sent by the God of the Israelites as a spirit in human form, to free his people from the ‘tyranny of the Philistines’?” Ekkor laughed himself silly, as if that was so incredulous.

Nor showed no amusement. “Well, if we don’t rid ourselves of him—and I mean permanently rid ourselves of him—that is just what might happen!” he snapped back. Then he leaned forward. “You have obviously not heard about this man’s exploits, have you?”

Not wanting to appear ignorant, but then also eager to hear the tales that had so astounded Nor, Ekkor hesitated and looked to the side. Nor replied quickly without giving him a chance to answer. “You haven’t, I take it. Otherwise you would not be sitting so indifferently upon that chair of yours.—If you had any loyalty to your country, that is.” He added the last part as a personal dig.

"Who else would I be loyal to? The Israelite pigs?" Ekkor barked awkwardly.

"Of course not," Nor smirked. "There are so many offences which he has committed against our people." Nor continued with an air of frustration and sadness. "It all started with some strange squabble that happened around the time of his wedding to a Philistine woman."

"He married a Philistine woman? Then how could he be saving his people from us and mingling at the same time?"

"There are many contradictions about this man. As I was saying, there was some sort of squabble, and his wife cheated him out of a prize that he was to win for a riddle he had put forth."

"A riddle?" Ekkor asked eagerly his eyes lighting up. "Do you know what it was?"

"Damn fool!" Nor muttered under his breath.

"What was that?" said Ekkor

"Uh, I said, 'they were fools'—accepting a challenge from one such as he with as little brains as they had."

"Hmmm. Well, anyway relate to me this riddle."

"How am I supposed to know it? I wasn't even there, but as I recall from the story it had something to do with a lion and some honey. But that is hardly the point here."

Ekkor looked disappointed, "Oh well, I suppose it must have been a poor joke anyway. These Israelites have no sense of humor."

In the spirit of contradiction, Nor replied, "From what I hear it was in fact a rather clever one, and that is why the Philistine men there had to beg his wife to discover the riddle from him. Ah yes, it was something like, 'Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness.'"

Ekkor halted for a moment, trying to figure it out himself. But upon realizing that he could not,

he asked, "And she told them?"

"Of course. She was a loyal Philistine woman."

"Oh yes, er, of course. Did they pay her to do this?" said the ever profit-minded Ekkor.

"That I don't know. But who cares? The men didn't have to pay Samson his high price."

"And what was that, my lord Ekkor?"

"Thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes ... each!"

"That is quite a hefty price for a regular man." Wanting to hear the rest of these controversial tales, Ekkor decided to appear unsure whether or not he would in fact help with more than just locating Samson—in the hopes of getting better paid, perhaps. "It is very possible I could help you. ..."

"It's *possible*?!" Nor said with a little too much disbelief that Ekkor would even consider not helping him.

A little frightened himself by Nor's instantaneous reaction, Ekkor quickly offered, "Er, no, I mean it is possible I could help you easily. Er, you know, that it wouldn't be such a difficult thing. But you see, I would need to hear all the details you have concerning these stories. I would need any clue that would help me entrap him."

"Of course!" Nor replied quickly. And suddenly it seemed that more details willingly came to his mind, and out his lips.

"His wife was a certain Lilia of Timnath," he began, and Ekkor sat on edge, his inquisitive mind greedily grabbing whatever information fell upon his ears.

After a few hours of hearing extraordinary tales from Nor about this Israelite, Samson, Ekkor knew just what to do.

"It seems that this man you seek out may be easily entrapped."

"Easily?! Believe me, we have tried. But a man who can smite a thousand of our armed and trained soldiers with a mere jawbone..."

"No, no. Brute force would never work here," Ekkor interrupted with the voice of a professional in his line of work. He propped his fat right hand on his knee, his elbow sticking out to the side, while the elbow of his other arm sat comfortably on his knee, his finger pointing at Nor as if using Nor as a focal point would help him think. He squinted his eyes, and his face seemed scrunched up as well. "What this man needs is a woman!"

"I'm sure he has one."

"No, no, Nor," Ekkor said in quite the familiar tone, which Nor would not have tolerated except for the fact that Ekkor was dangling above his head the answer to all his present problems.

"What this man..."

"Samson," Nor corrected.

"Yes, what this Samson needs is a crafty woman. No, no no. What *you* and your Philistine lords need is a woman."

"But we have wives!"

Ekkor's eyes narrowed as he shook the finger that was already pointed at Nor. "You must listen to the rest of what I have to say without interrupting me!"

Nor sat up and stiffened slightly, slighted by Ekkor's lack of respect for his title, yet not wanting to blow this testy man out of helping him.

"What *you* need is to get a *woman* who will help you find out his weak spots and thereby entrap him. Such unearthly power as his must have a secret, I am sure! If it doesn't, then we are all doomed and I cannot help you. But if it does, I am also sure that he will guard that secret with his life—especially from you." Ekkor shook his head. "This is not going to be easy, Nor. She will have to

gain his trust, and unless there is pure luck on our side, it will be some time before this can happen. *Even* if there is pure luck on our side ... er, *your* side, it could take some time.”

“Do you have a woman in mind?” Nor asked.

“This is difficult, because you almost need a woman who thinks like a man, that is to say, like me—perhaps not even who thinks as one, but who understands a man’s weakness. One who won’t fall in love with his charms and thus betray us instead of him. It is a very touchy thing.” Ekkor shook his head.

“So we are nowhere nearer the solution than when we started.” Nor despaired, and his voice showed great agitation.

Suddenly Ekkor’s face lit up. “I have it! I have the answer!”

“You had better have it! That’s what we are paying you for!” Nor snapped, overcome with possible excitement, yet also prepared to take revenge on Ekkor if he disappointed him.

“I do have it, but it is a little bit complicated.”

“Well, the sooner you begin, the sooner we can try to work it out.”

“I know the perfect woman for this.”

Nor’s eyebrows arched out of intense curiosity and eagerness to get with the plan.

“Her name is Delilah,” Ekkor said with great satisfaction.

The name didn’t mean much to Nor. He waited for the explanation, which he was sure was forthcoming.

“A relative of mine, in fact.”

Nor relaxed a bit, thinking that of course this would help Ekkor get the most out of the deal. Ekkor noticed and continued.

“You do not understand, do you? How could you? Let me explain. She was one of my best. She dealt

some excellent blows for me, and was as cold-hearted about it as I was. Never showed fright, never was a coward. Always followed through." He was careful not to give any details, for they had deceived some fairly wealthy and influential men in their Philistine world. But not high up enough that any of the lords would recognize her.

"So what is the complication then?"

"We had a disagreement ... several, actually, and then a final one where she refused to ever do anything for me again. You see, you must be careful because she is a feisty one, and is not easily persuaded. If she does not believe in your cause, you may as well forget it."

"We could threaten her. I'm sure she will respond to that."

"Like I said, she's cold-hearted and ruthlessly rebellious and defiant if she needs to be. But...", he said, shaking his finger excitedly at Nor, "but there is one good thing. She loves money! If you can convince her, and pay her well enough, she may very well do this."

"What if she disagrees?"

"She may, but if she tells you that she will do it, she will not disappoint you. She will follow through."

"We will have to approach her."

"And I get a cut?" Ekkor asked timidly.

"For referring her to us? If she is profitable, of course. Find her, Ekkor, and let me know speedily!"

"That will be easy enough. She lives in one of my houses, in the Valley of Sorek as a matter of fact. Only one thing..."

"A condition, Ekkor?" Nor asked, as if to say he really shouldn't be making conditions.

"This is not a mere condition, Nor," Ekkor said slowly. "It will only benefit you and your lords."

Delilah must not know that I am involved. If she hears a single mention of my name in your proposal, she will not agree.”

Nor raised his eyebrows curiously, waiting for an explanation to follow such a strange request. But no detailed one would come.

Ekkor scratched his head, wondering how to explain. But then decided to just repeat what he had said earlier, hoping Nor would be satisfied. “She has a great ought against me, one which will likely not be ignored by her in this lifetime—not for any great sum.”

“Very well then, your name shall not be mentioned. ... And,” as if remembering Ekkor’s great motivator, Nor looked temptingly in his direction, “you shall receive a handsome cut for your helpful information.”

Ekkor gave a great bow, as was the custom for one to do when nobility was leaving. Nor bobbed his head in return and left the room.

Once Nor had turned his back and was a few good strides down the hall, Ekkor got up from his bow and rubbed his hands together gleefully.

“Another ring or two... and it shall be for you, my bare finger! What think you of that? Hmmm?” he said animatedly as he bent his index finger in a bow of humble gratitude and chuckled. “Ha! I knew you would be grateful! Now, to inquire about Delilah!”



“Ha! This is marvelous! I knew it!” Ekkor said as he laughed coarsely and slammed his hand down on the table in front of the servant who had just brought him the news. “My little temptress sleeping with that Israelite Samson! This could be good!” He motioned for his servant to leave.

*It could be good, that is, unless of course my little slut has learned to love. That would pose a great*

*complication. But I don't think she has. No, not Delilah.* Ekkor clasped his hands and giggled excitedly. "I must tell Nor! Thank you, Dagon! Thank you!" he said with relish and utter satisfaction on his face, eyeing the miniature idol out of the corner of his eye.

He clapped his hands together and the servant who had just been dismissed came running back into the room, head bowed.

"We will be off to see Lord Nor. Prepare the horses at once! There is good news to be brought to our dear, dear friend Nor," Ekkor said with a patronizing smile on his face, imagining the great measure of coins that meant increased riches and prosperity for him.

"Yes master," the servant said, then bowed low and walked out of the room.



Nor slouched in his living room on a great and comfortable-looking chair bedecked with furs. The comfort hardly matched a man of his build and stature, someone whose manliness could be better brought out in armor and a hot day on the battlefield. But the comfort was his, nonetheless, and he did not spare himself any of it. Two maidens were beside him, one sitting on the arm of the chair, stroking his dark hair, while he in turn stroked the leg of the one that sat in his lap.

A manservant walked in, and stood before the few steps that led up to Nor's chair, elevating him from those who would come to visit.

"My lord, Ekkor is here," he announced.

Nor sat up and motioned the girls away, giving the one nearest him a kiss so that she knew to come back once Ekkor was gone. The girls skipped off.

"Oh, why don't you girls prepare some fruit and drink for Ekkor," he said to the departing maids.



"I hope he brings me good news," he muttered under his breath.

Ekkor was soon shuffling his portly self into Nor's presence as quickly as his feet could bring him. Ekkor was used to being the one in authority, most transactions taking place at his own home where he was master of all. But he did his best to play the part of the humble servant, though not without an obvious degree of awkwardness. He offered Nor a cursory bow and waited.

"So, Ekkor, what is it?" Nor asked, pretending not to appear too eager, lest Ekkor's news disappoint him.

"I have great news, Lord Nor," he said, and bowed again, most pretentiously.

Nor shook his head.

"Forget the pleasantries, Ekkor, and all the bowing. I take it you have not had much practice; it does not suit you in the least."

Not knowing whether that was a good or bad thing, or either, Ekkor looked around sort of oddly, and then, relieved no one else was there to witness the embarrassing moment, he mumbled, "Er, my apologies, Lord Nor."

Nor shook his head again. He was in an entirely different mood in his own home where he was caught unprepared, than when he was at Ekkor's, specifically for the purpose of scheming against Samson.

"Sit on that chair there. You'll be more comfortable," Nor said indifferently, not wanting to displease Ekkor, whose services the Philistine lords were depending on, yet trying also to keep this odd wealthy man in his own place.

Ekkor shuffled over and sat down, wiping his brow, for indeed the heat was unruly this day. The two girls then fluttered in with two small baskets of fruit, the girl that had been on the step giving

Ekkor his, and the other one giving Nor a basket.

Once they had left, Nor leaned forward and said, "So Ekkor, we have been interrupted plenty by the conduct of our own selves and with these two. Get to the point, man."

"I have news concerning Delilah."

Nor drew himself back into his former slouching position and plucked a grape from the basket. "Well? What is it?"

"It seems Samson and she have found each other already."

Nor knitted his eyebrows. "Is this good or bad?"

"If she loves him it could be bad. If she does not, it could be good. It would then mean she already has his trust—at least somewhat. I do not know if my little huntress..."

"Your former huntress," Nor corrected him.

"—Eh, of course, my former huntress—has learned to love."

Nor let out a hideous laugh. "Ha! All women know how to love. It is so in their instincts that one cannot hardly enjoy some fleeting pleasures with some of them without them learning how to love you—that is, *me*."

"You know, the one with the fruit, who wore a big blush and smile? It's her turn now. She is a pretty little maid, and a well-trained one. I'll keep no less, you know. But even she has learned very much the art of loving. First it was the master of the household servants, then a new servant I had hired—now it's me!"

Slightly impatient to give his explanation, Ekkor blurted out, "Not so with this one. She is a hardy woman for our time. Perhaps deep within her she has this ability, but not so long as I have known her."

"And has that been long, Ekkor?"

"She was fairly young when she was given to

me to care for, and has been alone for not more than two years.”

“Hmmm ... long enough, perhaps, if she has been in a position such as you have told me for all this time. Dealing with men of wealth and power...”

“Not in great numbers, Nor, but she was always successful, the few times she...”

“She must have had one love in all this time, no?”

“I do not know about Samson, but one thing I do know: she has a great, great love for silver. At least she did when I knew her.”

“And when was the last time you saw her?”

“Recently enough, Lord Nor,” Ekkor answered.

“So what is the plan?”

“You must still speak to her. I cannot, for...”

“I remember the reason. So, what kind of amounts would this woman deal with?”

Ekkor merely raised his eyebrows, not wanting to ask for too much or too little. “I am sure you know best.”

“Oh, stop trying to be so meek, Ekkor. I am also sure I know best, but I don’t know *her* best! If you could just tell me, then we could get somewhere in all of this!” Nor barked.

Ekkor was stupefied for a moment. He was used to barking, not being barked at. So, inconveniently for himself, he felt very speechless.

Nor, being in a lazy mood this day, just sighed. “I will have to speak to the other four lords about all this, Ekkor. But perhaps we could each give her 500 pieces of silver? What do you think about that?”

“I do not know. She has gotten much more on occasion. But thousand pieces of silver from each of you would be sure to convince her, for as valuable a target as this Samson is to you.”

“Five thousand pieces of silver?” Nor exclaimed in shock.

## BETRAYAL

Ekkor looked unfazed at the amount.

“Very well,” Nor continued. “I will keep that in mind. If you hear of any other news, do not hesitate to bring it to me. Oh, and where shall I find her?”

“Samson, it seems, goes to her, and not she to him. She remains in the Valley of Sorek.”

“The Valley of Sorek...” Nor repeated, wrinkling his face up as he began to contrive his plans and his presentation to the other lords, who he knew would do anything to get rid of Samson. No price was too high to pay to spare the blood of yet another thousand Philistines, and their nation’s honor.

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Samson and I—or rather Samson, mainly—had found a nice level of compromise, where his love for me and what he owed to his people did not cost him; at least not so far.

My house was not too far from a small stream. I would often swim in it at night when I was alone. It was somewhat of a retreat for me, oddly enough, even though my house had not many visitors of late, save Samson, and upon occasion, Girad.

It was late one afternoon and Samson had come by to visit. We lay on the bed chatting, and then he asked, “What do you do when you’re alone? Do you just sit here in your pretty clothes daydreaming?”

“About you? Why yes, always!” I laughed.

“Seriously now, what do you do? You seem to live a rather independent life for a woman of our time,” he said, placing his hand through a fold in my garment, where it roamed about my upper chest casually as he talked. “And I think you have not told me all of your secrets.”

Indeed I hadn’t! And I wouldn’t. At least not the deep and dark secrets that I had locked up behind great bars to keep them from screaming out and ruining my present. If I uttered one word, I feared it would all come flooding back and my carefully positioned steps would all come to naught. My

beautiful pretend world would crumble around me. And it was all pretend, except for Samson. He brought such reality, such sincerity to my life. But even that, I was afraid, would also come tumbling about me if I exposed myself and left myself vulnerable. He would then have to choose once again whether he really loved me not only because of all my attributes, but in spite of who I had been and what I had done.

And deception, particularly of a man who loves you, is a very cruel thing. If you have done it before, some will always fear you will do it again. This is essentially what I was afraid of. I was afraid that if Samson only knew, he would never trust *me* again. But perhaps if he had known, he would never have fallen into the trap I was to set for him—a trap which at this moment would have sounded horrendous to me.

“Secrets? What kind of secrets could a girl like me have?”

“That’s precisely what I’m wondering. Whatever they are, they must be very curious, for I have not heard a single word of them,” he said, still calmly as ever, kissing, as he spoke, each part of my body that he favored so.

“Indeed, I think you do not trust me. Now that I think about it,” he said with an ending kiss, after having toured my body with his lips, “I don’t think you have ever told me anything that I hadn’t heard from Girad or one of your friends. Come now, Delilah, tell me something. Something that I can hold dear to my heart, a little piece of yours that you entrust me with. Tell me what you did with yourself before I came along; I have never heard even of your recent past. Please,” he whispered, “tell me something, anything.”

His eyes looked so tender, so pleading. Here he was, king of strength, and yet he was pleading. I could not disappoint his tender request, but I would

not ruin the tender displays of love and affection that I had hungered for all my life by responding with some awful tale of what I had done. This would certainly have not been the time, if indeed there was any, to confess. That was not even a consideration.

I scrounged my mind for something, anything at all, that I could tell him. Strange it is how once you have locked up a part of your life, it seems everything becomes locked up as well, and you have the hardest time divulging any secret to one you love, no matter how insignificant. At least that was the way it was for me.

“Well...,” I began, hoping the rest of the words would come. Finally, I heaved an inner sigh of relief. “There is that small stream near here.”

“Yes?” Samson egged me on, hopeful that this was a good secret indeed.

“Sometimes at night in only a veil I run out to the stream and swim.”

“And that’s a secret?” Samson laughed in disbelief.

I looked offended. “Yes, I don’t tell everyone that.” That part was true; I didn’t.

“Since you seem so void of secrets, I think we will have to make our own.” He got up and grabbed my hand. I lay there reluctant to get up.

“What? What is it, Samson? I’m so comfortable.”

“We’re going off to make a secret that you can keep, and you won’t have to tell me because we’ll make it together.”

I looked at him, half-frightened, half-questioning.

“We’re going to that stream. Where’s your veil?”

My heart sank. I never ran out there in a veil. I did swim nude, but I wore my clothes all the way there. “I-I don’t know. Jeila usually gets it for me.” Another lie. I hoped he wouldn’t call her. I was so wrong.

The next moment he said, "Well then, let's call her."

"I think she's busy."

"Servants should never be too busy for their mistresses. I'm sure she will gladly come help you."

"No, no. I can find it!" I sat up and went to my closet.

"Why are you so protective of her today?"

"Perhaps because it's the late afternoon, it's not dark, and I don't want to go in my veil."

He sighed and laid back on the bed while I rummaged in my closet. I was ruining things. I couldn't find it anyway. I had veils aplenty, but none would ever be suitable to run outside in.

He relaxed on the bed, his eyes closed, either waiting for me or wondering what to do. Feeling bad, I came over and laid on him.

He opened his eyes and stroked my hair. "I'm sorry."

"You shouldn't be. I'm sorry."

He smiled that sweet smile that I was thankful I didn't have to die for, because I nearly would have. I playfully lifted one eyebrow.

"You are a wild, wild man, Samson. I'm afraid you have outdone me. But I cannot be outdone for long. The first star is appearing anyway, let us make the secret!"

He jumped up and we ran out to the stream, me leading him by the hand. We ran through the grass, and as we neared sight of the stream, I untied my sash and let it fall to the ground, it being the first in a trail of clothing to the stream. I jumped up and tugged at his headdress, which he helped me take off, still as we ran. I pulled on his belt and let that also join the path of clothing we were making. Soon enough, within steps of the stream, I had only the veil on my head. I took it and wrapped it around my body for the sake of



modesty, tying two corners in a tight knot so the veil, my remaining security, would not fly off. I felt frightened, yet exhilarated.

The veil, scant as it was, draped around my chest, and hanging down to my thighs, was blowing in the breeze. I had now—with Samson's help, of course—taken every other piece of clothing and jewelry off. So there we stood for the first little while, just beside the stream, clothing leading to our site like a trail, kissing and familiarizing ourselves (as if we had forgotten!) with all the curves and properties of each other's body.

"And so the wild man doesn't stop here," he said with a cheeky grin, while I nearly fainted within, though keeping as calm an outward appearance as I could. He tried to undo the tight knot that I had tied, but with great difficulty. Then with hardly a tug of his fingers, the tight knot in my veil had been torn down the center—yes, the knot itself, not the flimsy material, but the hefty knot that I had quickly tied in an attempt to preserve the remaining sense of security I derived from the idea that there was something around my body, even though the wind took it every which direction. But the knot was torn! I gasped to myself, and he chuckled, holding the veil in his hand.

"Sometimes a man has to use a little strength with women like you." He chuckled again and lifted my chin up, pulled his long blowing hair out of his face, lowered his head and kissed me.

He took the veil and with much difficulty due to the wind, laid it down on the ground, while I knelt, very humbled, beside him. He pulled me atop himself, and there we made such sweet love that I swore to myself I could never hurt this man who had such superhuman strength, yet such a human, tender heart.

"It's so dark now," I observed, the moon only

showing a sliver of its peaceful beauty this night, though the stars were plentiful.

"Now that it is dark," he mocked gently, "we can swim. You only do that in the dark, am I not right?"

I laughed, and he hugged me. I loved to be picked up in his strong arms, something I had missed much of as a child. Samson knew that, though I had never told him so in words, and so he picked me up, letting the torn veil fly wherever the wind would take it just now, which was flat against a nearby tree as if they two were hopelessly destined for each other.

That strong man took the few more steps to the stream, stuck a toe in gingerly, and then let out a yell. I shrieked and giggled.

"It's cold!" he protested.

"You get used to it," I assured him, and he took my word for it, walking till he was waist-deep in the water. He dropped me gently in and I swam about, while he stood in the center and complained about how cold it was.

"For a man of your strength, you are entirely a child within!" I jested.

"And I enjoy life as a child!" he replied. "It is more simple and pleasurable."

Was that ever true! He knew no subtle motives for the things he did, as did I. He responded to desire, and to obligation. And his desires were very simple, as evidenced by his life. His love was pure, sweet and simple. His struggles were simple, though not easy. Here he loved a woman of the people who were enemy to his own. I was always reminded of the fact when I thought on that morning long ago, after our first night together.

All this could not have happened if my father and mother had been alive. I would have been raised as a normal girl, waited until I was married before engaging in all this. But they had died when

I was young, and I had grown up with a distant relative, who was distantly related to Ekkor by marriage. By and by, as a young, but grown woman, I had come into Ekkor's care. But now I was old enough and wealthy enough to live on my own. It was something of a scandal, but people were busy minding their own pleasures and obligations that—for the most part—they had no mind to keep track of some man's wayward adopted daughter, so long as she kept to herself.

It had been rumored once that I was not of full Philistine blood, but that my mother was either a Hebrew or part-Hebrew. But these things were not openly spoken about. I was too young when my parents had died to even remember just who they were, not to mention their secrets and personal history. And when those rumors had knocked on our door when I was a youth, Ekkor had shoed them away with such vehemence that no one dared mention the thing again. So my life was built around rumors and controversies, and I was in no wise a shielded child.

The night came and went, but the secret of my true origins remained forever in my heart. It was burned there, a sweet memory that would soon become so painful that I would beg the gods to take it out of my mind. Yet there it would linger till the day I died.



“Well, Nor, you've brought us all here. I hope it's not like our other discussions—fruitless and just some means of getting all our hopes up for some peace and stability in our land, only to have them come crashing down again,” complained Kishek, a bearded old Philistine lord.

“And it's not as if they've ever done any good!” grumbled another. Rimur was always quick to give support to anyone's disparaging remarks.

Nor had gathered the other lords of the five chief Philistine cities—Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron—to this meeting to present his plan, though he expected it would be greeted with skepticism. Nevertheless, Nor bore himself with confidence, and was not disturbed in the least by their lack of it. This scheme was too good to fail. He sat at the table where they had convened for yet another meeting to plot a way to kill or capture Samson—hopefully capture and torture, but, if there was no other way, then just kill.

Every time they would gather to discuss their great ambitions, by the end they would forget entirely that this Israelite had killed a thousand armed men with a jawbone of an ass. It was not the only defeat they had suffered at his hand, but the most outstanding one, from which their pride still smarted on a daily basis.

“My lords, this plan will work,” Nor said confidently.

“Just like ambushing him at a party would work, while he was on his way to lie with a woman. Though he is man like any of us are, his senses were not too dull to disarm—and kill—the fifty guards we had. And they were hiding! Only some of them went forward—half, I think, according to your suggestion, Nor. The other twenty were hidden, remember all this?”

“We’ve heard the story before,” Kishek said, patting Rimur on the arm.

“And you will hear it again from me, because we must be reminded that we have failed! So we don’t walk into another trap.”

Nor was too confident to let anything disturb him. He folded his arms and leaned back in his chair. “If it pleases you, Rimur, tell us all the story again.”

“Remember the twenty were hidden in different

parts of the house. It was as if Samson had been at our meeting, and knew what we had instructed each of them. He followed his course, step by step uncovering their hiding places and slaying them. Some of them didn't even see him, and yet he saw them, and slew them before they could begin to raise a sword—or even to cower! With that one soldier who sat up in a tree along the path out the house, planning to jump on him, while the two beneath him hiding on the bushes would also jump out, do you remember what Samson did?"

"Of course we do. You've told the story many times," said a lord who hadn't spoken yet.

Ignoring him, Rimur continued, "Samson pulled the entire top half of the tree down, killing the man, and entrapping the other two in the bushes below, which he then proceeded to slay each in his turn. We are dealing with *strength*, my lords," Rimur added with emphasis.

"Indeed we are, but wherever there is strength, there must also be a spot of weakness."

"And what is that?" Kishek asked out of the corner of his mouth.

"A woman."

"Damn! You are so unoriginal!" Rimur retorted. "Were you even listening to the tale I just told? We used a *woman* to lure him to her chambers. He had been partying all the night." Rimur furrowed his eyebrows and folded his arms fatalistically. "We are going to be doing this to our dying day—old Kishek to his dying day sooner than the rest of us, but all to our dying day!" He emphasized his point by frowning and slamming his hand down on the table before folding his arms again.

"If the young man is finished, I will continue," Nor said as he narrowed his eyes at Rimur, who now remained silent. "As I said, we are going to use a woman, but not in the same way. Strength

such as this man possesses must have some secret. We are going to use a woman to discover this secret, if there is one, and tell us. Then we will take it from there.”

“Speak on, Nor,” Kishek said, with eager eyes.

“There is a woman we have in mind. Delilah!” Nor said, eyes full of meaning that not all the others comprehended.

“I’ve heard of her,” said Bishu, who always sat quietly and never said more than a word or two. “She’s the part-Hebrew one.”

“We don’t know that!” Rimur snapped. “And last I tried to inquire about it from Ekkor, he nearly had my head up on his wall alongside that lion’s head.”

“Silence, Rimur!” Nor said, exasperated at last.

“Do not silence me! Am I not a lord just as you are? I have every right to speak!”

“As do I, and I fear you have spoken more than your turn already!” Nor fumed.

“My lords, my lords,” Kishek interrupted. “Can we dispute later, and hear the plan in its entirety, that we might make an informed decision as to whether or not we at length find ourselves in agreement with Nor or not?”

The two settled down and Rimur agreed to listen, though fuming the entire time. Nor told them of the idea and the possible pitfalls, but also the great advantages and potential for its success.

“And she is with Samson already!” Kishek repeated with delight.

“Which means she could love him and our whole plan could come to naught,” Rimur countered. He always somehow managed to articulate the negative viewpoint. They knew that deep inside he agreed—or at least, he knew of no other way, and hated Samson enough to be willing to try.

“So how much will we pay her?” Kishek inquired.

“I told Ekkor 500 pieces of silver each...”

“Five-hundred pieces of...!” Rimur gasped.

“You did not let me finish,” Nor continued. “That was what *I* suggested. *He*, however, told me to consider a much greater sum. She would not be easily bought, he said. We shall have to be prepared to pay dearly for so costly an enemy of our people.”

The quieter lord, Bishu, spoke again. “So how dearly must we be prepared to pay?”

The others all looked at Nor with anticipation. “Yes, Nor. What is the sum?” another asked.

“One-thousand pieces of silver each,” Nor answered calmly.

The others nodded gravely, though Rimur could hardly believe his ears. However, he did not want to appear reluctant beside the others, so at length muttered, “Eight-hundred pieces of silver is as much as I will give. And if we all gave that much, it would still make a sum of 4000 pieces of silver—a price surely greater than even this man deserves.”

The other lords nodded again.

“Very well, 800 pieces of silver each,” Nor answered.

“But that is the limit,” Rimur accentuated. “We don’t have to offer her that much to begin with.”

“Who will go to see her?” Kishek asked.

“Perhaps Nor. He has come up with this plan; he should follow through with it,” Rimur suggested.

Nor agreed. He was interested in meeting this supposed woman of beauty. She would find quite the man in his presence, he was sure, and he would not, like the others, be bossed about.



Though all was settled as far as the plan, the lords were not over-confident. Samson had

reminded them time and again of their lesser state as enemies of God's chosen people. They were in their place, no doubt, but were squirming to get out of it as quickly as possible. The rest of the Philistines, just like the remainder of the country when an army goes off to fight, were too busy with their domestic lives, their loves, their own problems, to be too bothered. That is, until he struck their home through a lost son in battle, for example. Those Philistines hated Samson. And the bandits, the wanderers who would try to pillage an Israelite town or farm—some of whom met their fate at Samson's bare hands—feared and hated him as well.

The mere idea of Samson demanded great respect. He did not only have great strength; he also had tremendous skill and coordination. Somehow it seemed he was able to peer into the minds of his enemies and know their every move, and he used that skill and coordination to pre-empt them at every turn—even when he was taken by surprise. This was how he could, seemingly by natural means—though such a concentrated skill as I just explained is more than natural—defeat scores of armed men, no matter how well planned their strategy and tactics were. He also had a keen insight as to their weaknesses, and could size up a man's strength and points of weakness almost by watching him walk. It was a subconscious thing that he would do almost unwittingly whenever he met someone new, though if you asked him—which I did upon occasion, merely for sport—he could tell you their weak points quite succinctly.

“In a fight this man will always leave his stomach unguarded. So you can strike him there, and being as it is his weak spot, he will immediately send his hands to soothe it, while his whole body would reel from the stroke. Then you can smite him with the



back of your hand at the top of his neck, just by the ear and the jawbone," he would say of someone. "That will at the very least make him lose his balance, and if hard enough, snap his neck. If it only makes him lose his balance, you can lift him up, bend him over and smite the back of his neck with the side of your hand."

"You can smite him with the side of *your* hand. Mine would only feel like a slap and get me in worse trouble."

"No, I think you have potential. You look wicked enough!" he would say, and I would laugh.

Once he got me to tighten my sash and tuck my skirt into it, so that it would not be so long and flowing, and then he taught me some of his moves. I am sure I looked hilarious, but Samson did not laugh. He took my training very seriously.—So seriously in fact that I could not help laughing from time to time, before he would hush me and tell me I had to concentrate. He had an incredible sense of focus when he fought. It was obvious, although I had not actually seen him fight up till now. His easygoing nature would be laid aside for a moment, and all his thoughts would be on one thing—conquering.

This was one thing different between Samson and me, and perhaps with men and women in general. A woman's idea of conquering is slow and steady—at least a woman such as myself. She makes a plan; she sets a pace—plotting, as it were, one long conquest after another. But not Samson. Each conquest was separate and short. There would be no stopping—no, not until that particular victory was won. And so he had to focus. I, on the other hand, could possess a less intense concentration, just keeping a general overview of my goal, which my emotions would renegotiate every so often.

It never dawned on me that some of the fighting techniques he was showing me were actually being used against my people. As Samson, I had chosen to ignore the fact that our people were enemies. And while I lived in this blissful state of denial, Samson was still constantly confronted with the struggle between our people, and reminded of it on a daily basis when he was not with me. The double life no doubt strained him within and dulled his judgment, though perhaps he didn't even know it.

True, I proclaimed no loyalty to my people, and deep down inside I had no real loyalty to them. But slowly, growing more in love with Samson, inside I expected more love from him as well. I did not understand that he had given it all in the beginning; his was steady and sure, though mine was ever climbing. My motives would change with each phase of love, while his love was stable, though sometimes more obvious than others.

As I reached greater heights of love, and greater heights of vulnerability, I began to feel that he owed it to me to forget his people as I had ignored mine.—It would be a sign of love and resultant security for me, that he would one day love me so much that he would, for me, give up the very thing he had originally given me up for. This became my subconscious goal, perhaps—a state I had never dreamed of getting to that morning long ago when he had told me our love could not go on because of his obligation to his people.

I had compromised now, and was grateful only to revel in such love and pleasure as we had. I would turn my back on my people in an instant and trade them for such sweet love. But I was growing familiar with what I had and wanted more, though I was at the same time still very much enchanted with him—a contradiction I would not have thought possible had I not experienced it

firsthand.

Though by now I had heard tales of his great strength, and how he had used it to slay lions, rip sashes, or lift a heavy burden in some helpless man's field, I had still not heard even one story, not one example of the humiliating defeats my people had suffered because of Samson. He had spared me from all that. Even the words I had heard about the thirty men he killed to pay off some wager had escaped me, being locked securely with the remainder of thoughts that would otherwise seek to confront me with the impossibility of our love.

Though I hoped in my heart that he would give up the idea of his people and ours at enmity—something which our people had in fact started themselves—I had no idea how active he was against my people. Neither did I have any idea how close this hope was to crashing down around me, when I would find out about all he had done, and when I would at last betray him.



One morning Jeila came out to find me on the balcony where I had first met Samson. I had gone out there for some fresh air, and I was waiting for Girad to come and tell me about our joint investment in spice caravans. It was something his successful cousin had gotten him into, probably at the behest of Girad's father in an effort to quell his fervent attachment to drinking. Girad decided to let me in on it to give me something to do; plus he hoped to use my crafty little head to get us better deals.

"Someone here to see you."

"Who is it, Jeila?" I asked without turning around. I was looking out at the horizon, beautiful as it was that day.

"Lord Nor," she responded quietly, and I could hear her footsteps walking away.

## BETRAYAL

A few more moments and Nor stood behind me—quite close in fact, for someone who didn't know me. I think he already had thoughts along the lines of my future once I had betrayed the one who held my heart captive at present. And he was here to set my heart free—from the struggle, that is, or so it appeared. Though that struggle would never end. But I did not worry about the end just yet. I could hardly see a few steps in front of me.

I walked away and sat myself down on the couch I so loved, so that I would not be so close to him. I sprawled myself out over the entirety of the couch so as not to make the slightest room for him to allow any overt displays of the lust I could see in his narrow eyes. Nor was extremely passionate about whatever he did—ambitious as well, and very powerful. I am sure that many women would have given almost anything to be desired by him, with all his wealth and power. But I did not like to be overpowered in the least. My first response to him was cold and frigid.

“What is it, Nor?” I said, with a tone of great familiarity uncommon for anyone to give to a lord.

He laughed in disbelief. Or perhaps he finally believed all that Ekkor had said about me. “I believe we do not know each other.”

“But we know *of* each other, obviously. So what is it you have come to see me about?”

He was still standing near me, perhaps hoping I would give him room on the couch, but I stayed as I was. Only I made sure that I was not appearing too enticing or tempting; I had no reason or desire to allure this man, even though he was a lord, and in a position to make life very comfortable for me if I played him right. Of a truth, he represented something that would have attracted me a good deal before Samson had come along.

“There's a seat. Please be comfortable,” I said,

with a cold application of the least amount of courtesy one could have shown without crossing the boundaries into rudeness.

He found the seat that was to my left, and sat comfortably on it.

"I have a proposal for you," he began awkwardly. He had obviously prepared his speech ahead of time, but shaken by my shrewdness, seemed to have forgotten it all.

"I hope it is not a marriage proposal," I snapped. "I am not ready and I would rather hear it from someone else."

He smiled, somewhat embarrassed, yet still scrambling to hold onto the confidence that had filled his soul so nicely when he was with the other lords, but which I was stripping him of quite quickly.

"No, Delilah. It is a small favor we, your Philistine lords, would ask of you, in return for a great deal of silver."

"I am quite fine now, having much silver myself, and I am also engaging in the spice trade, with my friend Girad. I have no need of your silver, or your work."

"Congratulations on your spice trade," he said, formally. Then he leaned over for emphasis. "This is not for your benefit only, Delilah. You see, we do have need of you. We can find no one else with your skills," he said very tactfully.

*Skills?* I raised an eyebrow. "Well, I will hear your proposal, but that does not mean that I agree."

"Would 500 pieces of silver from each of us help you agree?" Nor had hoped that I could be bought more cheaply, and he would be able to pocket the remainder of the allotted money himself.

"I said I would hear your proposal. No promises," I snapped.

"Very well then," he said, slightly chagrined at my shrewdness, and began to tell me of someone

who had done their country great harm.

“This man has slain a thousand of our men at one time, and fifty or a hundred at other times. We have suffered great losses at his hand alone. You have heard what this man has done, have you not? The skirmishes he has been involved in?”

I knew he was talking about Samson. And I also knew that he must know I was with him—and thus fully aware of what a horrid thing he, and whoever else had conceived of this preposterous plot, was asking of me.

I was torn between cutting him off right there or hearing Samson’s secrets—secrets that I had not wanted to hear about before, but suddenly wanted to know, perhaps in an effort to make myself feel more comfortable with my own terrible secrets. I decided to hear all of his secrets from Nor. But his were going to deal a blow to me—not a bit smaller than mine would deal him, no doubt.

Pretending to be casual about it, I decided not to ask the name of this exploit-worker, but rather to ask about the deeds. I was not entirely a fool; I already knew the bottom of the matter. Nor was hoping I was only using Samson, and that I would betray him. That idea left me cold and confused. But the beginning, where he had said how Samson had killed a thousand of our men at one time, did not strike me well at all.

I had, as a woman, conveniently chosen to ignore the fact that his life consisted of resisting and fighting against my people. Once I heard about the actual deeds—though perhaps I should have imagined them all along, knowing Samson and knowing our people—I shuddered. How could a man who had so much tender love, and who had first acquainted me with the meaning of it, be so savage? I had forgotten my own savagery.

“Tell me more of this man. Must be quite a

soldier,” I commented.

“He is not even that. In fact, he is one of the judges of Israel.”

I shuddered again. I had already known it was Samson, but hearing each confirmation was like being struck across the face again and again. Or perhaps it was as if a knife was being plunged into my belly, and slowly turned each time another detail that matched Samson’s life was mentioned. I was rent. I was confused.

Interested though I was, I hardly heard a word Nor said after that. I only caught the most important lines, details that I would later ponder—details that would tug at the smallest sense of loyalty that I possessed to my country when later I thought on them. Yet how could I betray my Samson? Even so, somewhere within me there lingered a faint hope that he would conquer them, that he would not be smitten by them. Yet at the same time I could not refuse this lord. Everyone knew that. Doing so would mean death, perhaps—or at the very least losing the outwardly respectable standing I had managed to attach to myself. But perhaps that was better.

I could not decide just then, as I was flying down the rapids of confusion. Ekkor couldn’t even save me if it came to that. They would alert bandits to us and our wealth, and our homes would be stripped of all goods, with us left for dead or taken and sold, our houses burned. The cost on either side was great. My mind was torn; even those thoughts that had just come to me were disjointed, masses of confusion on both sides, pulling me this way and that.

“You will not need to kill him. We will not even kill him. We only want to discover the secret of his great strength, and use that secret against him, to capture him. He has continued being a

threat to our people for far too long, and the longer he lives, the greater defeats we shall suffer. If you had brothers or sons who had fallen at his hand, you would know and understand. ...”

I don't know what came over me, but something he said brought the coldness back, and there, in that moment of spite, as I listened to Nor's words, and tale after tale of the Philistines who had been killed at Samson's hands, I convinced myself that I would accept the offer—that is, at least I would see what I could learn of his strength.

Then, if I did choose to reveal anything to these lords, I could always play on the fanciful hope that Samson would deliver himself, and me. But I would not think that far ahead just yet. For the moment, I did not even know if he *had* any such secret to be discovered. The challenge I accepted was to find out if he did—and that would be dangerous enough, for him *and* me.

Neither would I do this for a mere 500 pieces of silver, even if each lord gave that amount to me. I would not be bought off cheap. They would have to pay for doing this to me!

I bargained and reasoned and refused for smaller amounts of money. Finally I brought Nor to their limit.

“Eight-hundred pieces of silver—each!” I demanded. Nor looked ready to nod his agreement, but I thought and pondered some more.

“No, that won't even do. This is a very difficult task and I will do it for you. But not for that amount.”

Nor looked at me, aghast. “That is 4000 pieces of silver! What more could you want?”

“My life! You are putting my life in danger! I may not even get to see those pieces of silver!” That was not my true concern. I only wanted them to be discomfited, to push them to the edge of their limits and a little beyond, so that they would think



twice about ever asking me to do something like this again. *If* they ever could ask me to do something again. *If* all went well I would see the money—and that would still be horrific. It would mean I would have sacrificed the love of my life for my life and a few pieces of silver. A sad, sad bargain at best.

“Very well then,” I said with a tone of resignation, “I will ask no greater price of you...” Nor seemed relieved for a moment, until I continued, “...than 1100 pieces of silver each!”

Nor frowned, a little distressed that I had surprised him yet again, and that his power and confidence seemed to have fled. “Er, Delilah, perhaps I was a little rash. But I think that 800 pieces of silver each will do. Come now, that’s a good and fair price, is it not?”

I raised my voice. “I am the one who has to do the work since you miserable lords are not capable! I say what I get paid, and if you don’t like it, you can find someone else. And if you want to kill me or beat me or sell me, go ahead! I’ll find my way out of your traps. And make a good living among the Hebrews, or something.” I mumbled the last sentence quietly, though I know he still heard me.

Nor was in no mood to argue. He was halfway fascinated by my fiery self, by my beauty, and by the fact that their secret to triumph lay in the hands of a fearsome, temperamental one as myself. The other half was frightened by the same things, by the power and fearlessness I portrayed.

“Very well then, I will tell the lords your part of the bargain and we will have the silver counted and waiting for you once the deed is done.” He’d have to convince the other lords of the extra 300 pieces of silver each, but it seemed a worthy task under the circumstances. “I am staying nearby at the house of the merchant to ensure these matters

are tended to properly. I have men under my command with me. You are to inform me of your plans when they are made, and any developments that follow."

I said nothing and he just sat there, thinking I know not what.

Finally I said, "Well, are you finished or is there more horror you wish to impart to me just now?"

"You will be glad of this one day."

"I am glad of it—for the money, and I will not be glad of it for any other reason—not now or ever!" I feigned greed. I did not care, and I would probably throw it all into that stream. *Excellent idea*, I told myself. *I may even tell them about it if I'm defiant enough when it's all over.* "It is not an easy thing, and it is dangerous as well," I said, finishing my explanation in a calmer tone of voice. "Jeila will show you to the door."

I was uncommonly rude to him, seeing that he was a lord and everyone else bowed to him and treated him with great deference. But perhaps that is what gave people some sort of respect for me, though none of that mattered just then, nor would it really matter to me again.

Girad came in just as Nor left.

"What was he here for?"

"Nothing, just a visit," I said with a melancholic tone of voice which told him that I wasn't ready to talk about it.

"Do you want to talk about our spice trade? We are going to be wealthy!" He tried to cheer me.

"We already are wealthy, and this is just a ploy by your cousin to make me use my head at something constructive, and to get you distracted from your drinking," I said with a great deal of indifference.

Those words rolled off Girad just like everything else did. He was too used to my moods to be

bothered or notice anything different.

"I haven't seen you so unhappy in a long time. But you are unhappy, there's no question about that," Girad commented, and then sighed. "Perhaps not enough men to conquer? What has become of Samson?"

I made a disgusted sort of grunt. "I never had that many men to conquer—and would you stop talking about Samson?"

"Very well, but you must admit you made quite a show for your short time as a conqueror of men." He held his fist up in the air in mockery. "Conqueror of men!" he whispered loudly.

I just rolled my eyes. Girad was a reminder to me of all my past. Samson had made me look to the future, to at least attempt to find my place and be a regular woman, a regular person.

At length Girad got up. "I'll come back tomorrow, perhaps, or maybe you can just send for me when you want to talk about it. In the meantime I'll make the decisions."

"Fine. I trust you, successful merchant that you are. Why are we doing spices anyway? We should do something you have talent in—like wine, perhaps!" I called out sarcastically as he walked away. Were I not so beside myself with anguish and confusion over Nor's offer, I would have thought seriously about my last sentence. Girad did possess a great knowledge for the choicest wines and the choicest deals. We could have perhaps lived a normal life and said goodbye forever to that awful past that seemed to now have pulled me back within its grasp. I was once again going to play the seductress that each man I seduced had fallen for before, only this time it was the man I loved.

My heart was so encumbered with confusion that not a tear would roll out of my sorrowing eyes. Nor took this as evidence of my coldness of heart.

## BETRAYAL

But I knew that somewhere the waters were swirling about, and one day soon, when all this was done—whatever the outcome was—they would burst out of my eyes like a raging torrent. And now was the torture of waiting. Would Samson and his God deliver him and me from this terrible scheme? Or would there be no escape for either of us once I had discovered this prized secret? Though I had agreed in word, the decision had not yet been fully made, and I told myself that it would not be made until I held the secret of his life or death in my hands. But I failed to realize that by then it would be too late to think of it as a decision—the final act of betrayal would become inevitable.

- 5 -

The following events were related to me after they occurred, as I myself was not present. But I relate them to you here that you might catch another glimpse of this man whose existence would define the record of my life.

Samson was traveling to a city of Israel near the Philistine border, by the name of Beth-Shamish. He had been asked by the elders of that city to come settle a livestock dispute. Two herders from opposite sides of the city had been in dispute over rights to the grazing grounds on the hills that surrounded the small town. The disagreement had quickly spread throughout the entire town, as in such small outposts most everyone is related to someone else in the city, or is a friend or an associate. This had created no small stir, and the elders had appealed to Samson, by way of a messenger, to judge over the matter.

“A tedious matter indeed,” Samson said to himself. “But yet I suppose it is one of the many duties of a judge of Israel.”

He set off early the next morning when the sun had not quite yet fully risen, for he had a great distance to travel. As he started down a particularly rocky part of the path, bordered on each side by high cliffs, he heard a noise in the distance, something like the braying of an ass. He rounded

a corner and sure enough, there was a small caravan some ways ahead of him.

The area was a kind of no-man's-land, a wilderness that created the ideal breeding ground for thieves and bandits. Samson, always the kind protector, thought he would join the small mule train and provide some safety through this treacherous region.

"Ho there, sir!" he called out. "Hold there and I will join you."

The caravan stopped and the driver looked about to see Samson running towards him.

"Greetings!" he said. "This is an area known for its danger. You may wish to have me travel with you to provide you some protection. I am Samson, of Israel."

"Samson!? *The* Samson? Why, the stories I have heard of you are magnificent! No other name gives rise to as lively debate as that one. If you are indeed he, I shall have a tale to tell my grandchildren, that I traveled with the great Samson this day."

The mule driver continued on in flowery tones, recounting the deeds of Samson and extolling his power. During this discourse Samson became suspicious for an instant—he couldn't tell why and he had no reason to suspect anything was amiss, yet something bothered him about this man. Perhaps it was his strange accent and manner of speech. Samson shrugged the feeling off and continued listening to the high praise he was receiving at the hands of this stranger.

The traveler, whose name he learned was Jared, finally completed his speech and turned his attention to more practical matters of travel.

"See here, the day waxes hot and my animals are in need of water. I know of a place not too far from here where we may rest and regain strength

for the rest of our journey.”

Samson replied, “I thank you for your kind offer, but I do have business to attend to and must be on my way.”

“But what of the bandits?” Jared asked in a whimper. “Perhaps that is their plan. To lie in wait at the places of rest to then plunder my goods as I rest! And you do have many long miles ahead till you reach Beth-Shamish. Surely even a man of your strength will need food and water to continue his journey! Come with me to the fountain, and from thence resume your trek.”

“How knew you I was traveling to Beth-Shamish?” Samson asked quickly. “This road leads in many directions.”

“Why ... uh ... I am sure you must have mentioned it to me earlier as we walked,” came Jared’s response.

“Very well,” conceded Samson, “lead on.”

He would have felt very different indeed if at that moment he could have seen the dark smirk of satisfaction that wormed its way across Jared’s face.

An hour had passed and they were well off the original road they were traveling, when at last they arrived at the fountain. It lay there bubbling up from a small cleft in an upright rock. Around it was a moderate clearing of about 50 feet in each direction. The geography of that place was that of a small canyon, with the fountain at the bottom of the cliff walls.

Samson headed directly for the fountain and was about to refresh himself when he heard Jared utter an ear-piercing whistle. At that instant Samson turned and saw the cliffs brimming with armed soldiers who had been quietly laying in wait at the top.

*Phzzzzzzt!* A spear cut through the air and dealt

Samson a glancing blow in the upper shoulder. He shook himself and sprang for Jared—or whatever the man's name was—angry at having been led into a Philistine trap. It was now that he got a good look at the contents of the “caravan” that he had escorted all this way. Jared easily ripped open the sacks on the mules' backs, and at least twenty swords fell to the ground. Throwing off his long traveling cloak Jared now stood, a sword in each hand.

Samson, reaching him, ducked his first swing with the left, and caught the right in his vice-like grip. Before Jared could wrench himself free, Samson's powerful fist slammed into his forearm, instantly breaking his wrist. Jared screamed in pain, and then staggered backward at another blow to the jaw from Samson's elbow.

Turning quickly, Samson anticipated that the first of the soldiers that had begun to spill down the cliff would reach him within seconds, and he had no more time to waste. Grabbing the remaining hand that still held a sword, he turned it about until it lay deeply implanted in the heart of its owner.

The first of the troop had reached him by now, and Samson sized up his opponents. He counted about 100 men. Backing up against a stone cliff to prevent attacks from behind he cried, “Oh God, grant me strength and deliver me from mine enemy!” And with that he attacked. A spear was thrust at his torso, and he dodged and wrenched the spear from the hands of the soldier.

Now if Samson was an opponent to be feared when armed only with the jawbone of an ass, he surely now was nothing less than a tornado of destruction when possessing a more deadly weapon. One then another fell before him as he turned this way and that, smiting down his foes on every side.



A group of soldiers had surrounded him and thought to make a concentrated attack from all sides. He anticipated their move and lunged forward, snapping his spear in the middle over the head of the first man, rendering him unconscious, or worse. Then with a fragment of spear in each hand he thrust out to either side burying the sharp shards of wood and iron into the bellies of those closest to him.

Once again unarmed, he brought his fist into the face of a sturdy-looking soldier, specifically chosen for his height and build.

"This large fellow ought to do nicely," he smirked.

Grasping the stout and unconscious man by his ankles, he began to swing him in the faces of the approaching troops, using him both as a human shield and weighty club.

When he had gained good ground using this method, he thought to exchange him for a less cumbersome weapon, so throwing him full in the face of his fellows he searched the ground for a sword or spear. Considering the carnage that had already taken place, locating a weapon was not difficult. Choosing a large sword, he once again charged to the attack. After several more minutes of fighting and about 30 Philistines later, a thought struck Samson.

*Suppose I were to let myself be captured, thought he. I would then discover the location of their garrison and be able to do more damage to them from inside than by merely dispatching the troop sent to capture me.*

This seemed to be a good idea, and so with their next mad onslaught he went down beneath them. He received a great many bruises, but he was alive. They bound him securely—or so they thought—and lashed him to the back of two horses

they had waiting on the other side of the canyon.

As the troop marched away, considerably less in number than when they had arrived, they were jubilant to now have their feared and hated enemy in their hands at last. Ahead of them lay the south garrison of Ashdod, and behind them lay a bubbling fountain, whose pool was now flowing red with blood.

During the rough jolting journey, as Samson feigned unconsciousness, he heard many things concerning him.

"We ought to pluck out his eyes," said one, "lift him high on a pike and leave his body to rot in the sun and become food for the carrion birds."

"Or perhaps we could SHUT UP!!!" barked the troop leader, as he gave the soldier with the morbid imagination a good backhand in the face.

"You all know full well why we were sent," he continued. "We were sent to capture and bring him to our officers wounded, just enough to render him unthreatening, but not enough to kill him. I'm sure in the dungeons and torture chambers of our city he will sooner wish we had killed him, but we shall not give this Israelite dog the pleasure of tasting death so quickly. Son of a whore and a jackal." Then he spit on the ground as if to bring added insult to his last muttered curse.

*So it is to be torture, is it? Samson thought. Ah well, at least I'm not to be vulture food. Oh, that one struck fear into my heart! He laughed to himself. I have heard threats of this nature so many times before that if I were not supposed to be wounded and senseless, I think I should yawn.*

The troop leader's voice rose once more, "Yet I do have an idea; one which should prove quite unpleasant to our new guest. When we imprison him in our garrison, we will feed him only with food first offered unto our god Dagon. We will do

this in his sight so he will see and know it. Then if he wishes to be fed he will have to eat the food of our god. In this manner shall we torment him, and cause him to become weak with hunger and thirst and cause him to accept the food 'defiled' against his God, which in turn should make his God angry with him and perhaps smite him for us."

"Or better yet, Samson will rise up and fight against his God, and they shall both slay each other!" came a voice from somewhere in the column of marching men. At this the entire troop roared with laughter, and it became the starting point for many a foul joke and curse against the God of Samson.

Samson, hearing every word from where he lay, began to feel his arms flex and grow against his bonds. His blood boiled at these insults against Jehovah.

*Still, I will keep my peace, he mused. Judgment will surely come to them. And I pray to God it may be at my hands. I will avenge Your name, my God; I will show these uncircumcised fools that You are Lord.*

When they finally reached the garrison, Samson was hurled roughly into a small dungeon that was little more than a stone well with iron bars guarding the top entrance. Now it would have been no great task for Samson to rip them apart, but he was at the bottom of this well at a depth of about 20 or 30 feet, making it impossible for him to reach the bars. This he had not anticipated. He was not only unable at this present moment to escape, it seemed, but he would not be able to survey the fort as he had originally planned.

"My God," he cried. "Have I been rash? Was I hasty in my decision? Will my enemies have me? What then will become of Your people?"

Just then he felt the den becoming warm, and the dim light that reached it growing brighter. He

felt the Spirit of God more heavily upon him, and he heard these words in his heart:

*“Fear not, Samson, but rise and fight. Behold, I will strengthen you and you shall live to free your people.”*

He felt a new strength surging through his arms and legs. He gave a mighty leap, and his hands closed upon the iron bars at the surface of the well. With his free hand he easily tore them to the side and leaped out. Pausing for a moment he looked down from whence he had just come, the ground beneath him was as he had previously judged—at least twenty feet below. It was clearly only through the power of God that he had been able to attain such a jump. Marveling at the greatness of God, he disappeared into the camp.

Now free to roam about as he pleased, he thought he would first do some surveillance of the camp to assess their strength and number. What he found disturbed him greatly, for within the camp there were scores of Hebrew women and children, being roughly herded and shoved about by their armed captors. He also spied much loot and spoil—garments, livestock, gold and sacred ornaments such as might belong to a small city, a city like ... Beth-Shamish.

All at once he realized that not only had these ungodly men set a trap for him, but while they waited had thought it a good day to carry out a raid against a defenseless city. The men and elderly had most likely been killed or forced to flee into the surrounding wilderness, and the rest of the unfortunate township was destined for the slave markets.

*I have been led of God, Samson thought to himself gladly. For if I did not allow myself to be captured, I should have reached the city far too late to be of any service. Now I shall restore these captives*

*to their city, and show to these Philistines the meaning of discomfort and loss.*

*But how? The encampment is nigh well surrounded by armed guards, and within it are not less than two hundred men that draw the sword. Soon my escape will be discovered and the cry of alarm will be raised. I must work quickly.* All these things Samson mulled over as he made his way ever closer to the places of confinement where the bulk of the captives were held.

It was a part of the garrison with a wall around it, as high as the heads of perhaps two tall men. Other than confining captured enemies or animals, Samson could see no other real purpose for its existence and this made him wonder if raiding parties of this kind were not performed more than once by this particular unit.

The well in which he had been placed was in the upper north side of the small base, and the prisoner holding cell was towards the far south of it. So as he came upon it, walking lightly along the roofs of the various barracks and stables of the Philistines, he spied at least six guards near the entrance. Several others, he had seen, were scattered loosely about the little fortress. But most of the fighting force seemed to be partying in one of the towering sections of the wall not too far from the entrance itself.

Stopping for a minute to plan his moves, he leapt down from where he was concealed and disabled two of the guards below him with his fall. Just around the corner two other guards were chatting.

“So far so good,” he whispered, noting that no shout of alarm had yet risen from any quarter of the camp.

For his next encounter, however, speed was of the essence if he was to disable the next two guards and disappear unseen around the corner

again before the last two watchmen on the tall wooden tower would notice anything was wrong.

"Three ... two ... one ... now!" He silently counted as he raced around the corner. Coming up at the back of one of the guards, one of his mighty arms encircled the man's neck and broke it before a sound could exit his throat. With his free hand he plunged the same guard's spear into his counterpart's heart, also killing him instantly and noiselessly.

Then, grabbing the two dead men one at a time, he lifted them high above his head and hurled them quickly one after the other at the guards atop the tower. As they stood there, up in the high turret, they scarcely had time to react before their two late friends came raining down on them like rocks thrown from a large catapult.

At the moment of this distraction, Samson applied a good kick to the door of the stockade where the helpless people of Beth-Shamish were held. The people inside were more than a little frightened at the sight of the mighty man that had just burst into their midst with a loud crash.

"Come," he said in a pleasant tone, with a smile of reassurance on his face. "I am Samson, the Danite. Let us all leave this place."

At the name of Samson, every set of tired, sad eyes in that place grew wide with new hope and excitement. Samson was here—to deliver them from their enemies and persecutors.

Realizing that the small bombardment he had given the guards earlier would probably not stop them for long, he spoke firmly and quickly to them all. "Return to the desert as quickly as you can, and make your way back to your city. I will try to gain you as much time as I can so that you can make good your escape."

With that he gave a mighty shout and hurled

himself against the far wall. With a crumble of dust, stone and brick, a portion of the outer wall crumbled outwards, leaving a clear path to the desert and to freedom.

He helped the weak ones out the best he could, but then he had to return quickly to the gateway of the fortress to see whether the Philistines had become aware of what was happening.

The tall guard post presented the most imminent danger, therefore it would also become the first target of Samson's fury. Looking around, he chose a piece of the fallen wall that was at least twice his width and weight. His plan was to use this as a projectile aimed at about the midsection of the tower, and use the size and speed of it to topple the structure—an idea that would have been an unlikely plan for any other living man, but for Samson it was no sooner thought than done. The guards for the first time showed real fear as the giant rock smashed broadside into the beams of their tower, making it fold down with a tumultuous crash that shook the entire fortress.

The piercing shrieks of the guards as they hit the rubble did even more to demoralize the few troops who were happening by, even than the great display of strength they had witnessed at Samson's hands. As they collected their wits and sounded the alarm, Samson collected spears from the hands of the dead guards that lay strewn about the rubble. Turning on the soldiers—which now began pouring in his direction from every corner of the camp—he once again became that storm of fury, lashing here and there, striking down one after another with the invisible shield of the power of his God around him, protecting him from even the slightest hurt.

The attack ended as most one-sided battles do—with the outnumbered and weak eventually

turning to flee. Only this time it was the many that fled, and the outnumbered that remained.

Choosing to perhaps suffer some overseer's wrath or mockery rather than impalement or dismemberment, the remaining soldiers turned quickly to the desert and ran with all their might. Every moment they remembered the now infamous story of the three hundred foxes, and that the same pursuing force may have been right behind them as well. In fact, it was nearly twilight before most of the men finally ceased running.

Now that the danger had passed for the rescued Hebrew captives, Samson ran quickly to rejoin their party and travel with them till they got home to their city—or what was left of it.

The place was a smoldering ruin, nothing but heaps of ashes where houses and markets used to stand, and the dead corpses of men who had bravely tried to defend their homes and families when the attack had first come.

Samson mourned with them as they buried their dead and tried to set up temporary shelters for the night. At last he left them with promises of returning as soon as he could, with supplies and new settlers for the rebuilding process. And with that he turned his face towards the Valley of Sorek, and set off into the night.



We had not been lovers for long. It had been months since we first met, but then after our first night together he had attempted to end it there. And so I had not seen him for weeks or months after that—I cannot remember exactly. He had spent much of his time among his own people, and would only come to see me every now and then. But now he stayed with me more frequently than he had before—that is, when he was not busy judging Israel, or slaying my fellow countrymen.

“Samson?” I called out, as I wandered back to my room after Girad’s short visit had come to an end. I could not believe that Samson might have been under the same roof as I was discussing his betrayal with Nor—or rather, as Nor was discussing it with me. But I thought I was certain that through the half-opened door to my bedchamber, I had seen him resting on my bed.

I walked into the semi-dark room. Nor had talked to me for a good while, and after speaking with Girad for a brief time, evening had already come upon us.

I approached the half-opened door. It *was* Samson.

“How long have you been here?” I mumbled.

“Not long,” his sleepy voice answered. A few grunts, yawns, and stretches, and he turned over

onto his back. "Come over here, Delilah. The day has been exceptionally long."

*So it has, Samson. So it has,* I thought to myself, as I walked obediently over and snuggled up to his chest. Those same warm, comforting and secure arms. Only they were not secure anymore, nor were they comforting. Now, instead of my life being in his hands, his was in mine. It hurt my entire being to know that he was lying with his trap—me.

I made myself comfortable, and we lay there in silence save for a sigh here and there, and my heavy breathing. My heart was pounding. I was still indecisive. *Should I tell him what I have been asked? What if he leaves me for fear of bringing greater trouble upon me, as befell his first wife? What if he finds out my secrets later and then leaves me anyway?*

I was suddenly afraid of my own double-mindedness, afraid of confessing to myself that I still truly loved Samson. I was torn between him, and the people I had been so rudely reminded of were mine. I could turn to neither for help and protection without betraying the other, and endangering myself. No, I would have to play out the decision I had made on my own, and see where it would lead me.

"Samson?" I whispered, tracing the outline of his lips with my finger. He kissed it as a sign of acknowledgement.

"How did you become so strong?"

"I've told you before. It was a gift of God," he said sleepily, and then turned over onto his side. He brought my arms about his neck and held them comfortably as he obviously was trying to catch a wink of sleep. So unguarded he was around me. With all others he was alert and watchful. But now it was dangerous that he slept so trustingly in the bedroom of one who was being paid to betray him.

“But there must be a secret,” I pled. Then I joked, “Is it your diet? Is it grapes? Perhaps if you eat none, then your strength will vanish? Or perhaps it is my presence?”

“I have not known you all the while I was strong. I have only known you a short while. I was always strong.”

“I know. I was only speaking in jest. But how? What is the secret?”

“Secrets, secrets,” he said quietly and then more loudly, “You are not the one to ask anyone’s secret. I imagine you have a whole warehouse full of wicked little secrets you have never been courageous enough to tell me.”

Whether he jested or not, I didn’t know. But what he said was pointing in the direction of such a sensitive truth that I began to squirm.

“I have told you everything.”

“And my strength comes from riding asses,” he joked.

“It does?”

“No!” he turned to face me. “You have told me everything as much as my strength comes from riding asses.”

“No, I *have* told you everything.”

“The one secret you told me wasn’t even completely true.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The veil, swimming at night.”

“I do swim at night.”

“Yes, but you don’t run outside in a veil.”

“And how would you know that?”

“Because I know you, and that is not like you.”

I was silent.

“Well? Tell me I am perceptive,” he taunted.

“How could you have known? Did you only just now know?”

“I suspected then, as you told me.”

"How did you know what part was true and what was not true?"

"I didn't at first. So I tested you. You protested greatly to wearing a veil to the stream, making all sorts of excuses, even stooping to attempt that which you have never done, and that is, protect your servant from work—the light work of looking for your veil. The one you used to go swimming every night. But you made no protest to the swimming, and then when we got there, you were quite comfortable and used to the water. See? Nothing spectacular. You are simply a bad liar, that is all," he said matter-of-factly, and then grabbed another pillow and added it to the heap under him.

I was slightly offended that I had been caught in a lie, small as it was. That meant there must be other signs of my deception. I was worried. And then I was upset at him.

Then my mind wandered to the stories Nor had told me, parts of which I only faintly remembered. The discussion with Nor seemed like a horrid nightmare now that I was in Samson's presence. But I wanted to remember the stories he had told me. And what better way to hear of them than from the man himself?

"Samson." I nudged him.

"What is it?" he said without opening his eyes.

"Tell me of your exploits."

"Woman, I am trying to sleep. It has been a long day."

"Why has it been a long day?"

"So much fighting. I am exhausted," he said, gave another yawn and then lay still for another moment or two before I nudged him again.

"What?" he asked, a tone of exasperation in his voice.

"Fighting whom?"

"Wicked people."

"My people?" I asked. He propped himself up on his elbows then and looked straight into my eyes.

"What do you want to know? Long ago I told you of my commission from God. ..."

"Your god."

"The God. And that it was to deliver my people out of the hands of the Philistines, which happen to be your people, my lover. After what happened to my wife, who was a Philistine, things could never again be the same between your people and me."

"She is no more?"

"Did I not tell you that her house was burned down with her and her father in it?" He was getting slightly agitated with me that I had brought up the one topic we never discussed.

I did not answer. He had never been upset with me for as long as I could remember. Even that one morning long ago, he was firm, but not upset. The expression on my face must have shown my worry at my having caused his displeasure, because he sighed and put his arm around me.

"I am sorry. I thought that we had agreed not to discuss our people. I have an obligation and that comes first, before anything else. It is why I received this strength. Your people have persecuted mine for many, many years. My people prayed to God for deliverance, and at length, God sent me and gave me this strength that I might deliver my people—His people."

"So if you don't help your people then the strength will be taken away? That's the secret?"

"No, it's not," he said and put his head down in the pillow. That was his first and terrible mistake. I had up to that time wondered if there really was a secret. Now I knew there *was*, and I just had to find out what it was.

I said nothing for some time, while Samson lay

there, asleep or in thought, I knew not. At length he rubbed my arm affectionately. "I meant not to upset you."

But I was already upset. If he supposedly loved me as much as he said he did, why could he not make a decision? And better yet, why could he not trust me? I paid no attention to the fact that though I said I loved him also a good deal, I also had not made a final decision, as I saw it. I had only taken steps towards a very wrong one. And I as well did not trust him. But never mind reason. When it is within a heart to consider betrayal of one very dear, there is hardly a thing that agrees with reason.

He in fact had made his decision, and he had told me of it. He had told me that he loved me, but that he had an obligation to his people—an obligation that had not changed though we had grown closer. Or perhaps it was more I who grew closer, though he may have in ways small. I was the one who was between two worlds—my Philistine world and my world with Samson. It was not he who was unfair; it was I. But it did not appear that way then.

Though living in some state of greater or lesser compromise, he had learned something from the experience with his wife. He knew that if he wanted to live with one he loved, if she was not of his people—and in fact, was of the very people who were enemies to his own—there would be rules. It would never be as it would be with him and an Israelite woman.

"Then, tell me your secret. Or do you not trust me?" came the belated and badly worded question.

His eyes opened wide and he looked straight at me. "Once, long ago, my wife used those very words to pull a secret out of me. I gave her that secret, and I lost her. I will not lose you."

"Of course you won't, Samson," I said, full

knowing that except by divine intervention, that was a lie. Our days together were numbered. But I continued. "I am sorry for those words. But I cannot think of us as from two different peoples anymore. My heart beats alongside your heart, and I want to be hidden from nothing that your life involves. I know that you are actively against my people, but I am no patriot. I can understand. I love you more than them. And lives—lives are always taken when peoples are at war. They will either be the lives of my people, or the lives of the people of the man I love. I know of your strength—I have seen some small amounts of it." I laughed gently. "Like when you tore my veil in half at the knot. It took me by surprise entirely."

My plea sounded so sincere. But of a truth, sometimes it was. From this point on my life knew no stability, if what I had before could be called that. At some points the things I said would remind me of how deep my love had been, or how deep I thought it had been, and at other times I only said the words because they sounded good. Sometimes a tear rolled down my cheek as I spoke, because that was how I felt. Other times I only lied. My heart was growing harder, though, and the more I spoke, the more I feigned the sincerity.

Samson took my hand and held it.

"Bitter a truth as this may be, I must tell you this in all honesty, and withhold nothing from you. I do not trust you as yet. It is simply because of my past. But when I do, I will tell you the secret. And it is not your fault that I do not trust you. It is not because you are untrustworthy, but because I have been betrayed before. My wife thought she only told a riddle, and she did so under threat. And I forgave her. Perhaps there was no other way for her. They threatened her. But we were never as man and wife again. And she was murdered not

long after. You understand, don't you, my dear Delilah?"

I nodded. I knew now I could never tell him what had been asked of me. It was his trust I wanted to earn—would need to earn if I would discover his secret. And if I told him the truth, he would only be forced to keep both his trust and his secret from me.

"I *will* tell you, whether it be tomorrow or in a year from now, or in many years from now. One day, I will tell you all."

"Then I shall wait, however patiently, for the day when you will bare all of your heart to me."

"So will I, for there is much in *your* heart I know, that I must know of someday—when *you* trust *me*."

I looked down. The tears welled up, but would not come out. It was not the time.



"Samson," I said the next day, looking up at him with a sheepish expression. I lay in his lap upon a comfortable couch in a guest room.

"Delilah," he responded, leaning back against a pile of cushions, one hand behind his head and the other stroking my head.

"Samson, will you tell me your secret now?"

He laughed. "You have no patience. It has only been one day, and I promised that eventually I would tell you all."

"You are right, I have no patience. I am stricken with curiosity. You cannot blame a woman in love for wanting to know the prized secret of her lover."

"And so I do not blame you," he said with a friendly smile, though inside I knew he was eager to end this conversation. "But..."

He pulled me up into his lap and I looked straight into his eyes. "Samson, you must tell me. Have I ever done anything to cause you not to trust me?"



He sighed and leaned his head back, pretending to be deep in thought. He reworded my question and jested, "Have you ever betrayed me?" and closed his eyes as if trying to remember.

The words stung my heart and knotted my stomach. I knew the answer. I hadn't. But would I?

Still in the spirit of jest he brought his face up close to mine and smiled, "No, you haven't. Not yet."

All this he did in jest, but my spirit was sorely discomfited. Samson noticed the anguish on my face. I had not hidden it well.

"What is it, Delilah?" he asked me, stroking my cheek and chin. I said nothing. What could I say? For a moment I wanted to tell him all. Then perhaps he could go and smite the lords and free me from this terrible snare that I had found myself in. But then, what if later he found out that I had betrayed many before, and then found it not in his heart to love me anymore. Without my strong man to protect me, I would be food for the Philistine lords or even the people, who would have heard by then that I had betrayed the nobles.

"What is it, little temptress?" he teased and prodded.

Temptress. That further stung my heart. He was obviously jesting now, but I feared this was proof he would not take kindly to the knowledge that I was indeed a temptress at heart. And how long could he, even he—the strong man who had captured my heart and nearly tamed it—keep me from being who I thought I was deep down inside, and who I was on the threshold of resigning myself to be.

*Why such a torn heart?* I thought to myself. *Where is the coldness, the commitment to my causes? I have causes too. I have obligations. Not as noble as Samson's, perhaps, but who is to say what is more noble? Each side always thinks theirs the more noble*

*cause*. And so I further confused myself. But the confusion was losing hold, and I was beginning to get angry—angry already that he would leave me once he found out about Ekkor and what I had done, how I had stripped people of their wealth and dignity, just by feigning love. He would never trust me again, never love me again. And I could not be tossed to the side like a dog.

I already began to smolder.

And then he had called me a temptress—the very thing that I was running from, the part of me I wanted to hide, no, throw out to the dogs never to be seen again. I liked what Samson had made me. But when would the taming of my wild heart ever be complete? Would it take the great risk of telling him all and then giving him the choice?—Putting myself at his mercy? The thought of him loving me anyway, after I had told him how I had agreed to betray him but now was trying to save his life, and how I had betrayed others—that was a sweet thought. Forgiveness was a sweet thought.

Then I thought again, why should I be forgiven? I had done distasteful things, with low regard for another soul. But then I reminded myself that it was my *cause*. I was trapped as well, young and under Ekkor's power. Not yet strong enough to make the break. But now I was. Or was I?

"Delilah," Samson said slowly, in a tone to break whatever spell held my eyes faraway from where I sat at that moment.

I turned and looked him directly in the eye. For a moment my anger, the anger that I knew I would feel if he deserted me, showed through. The anger that my sensitivity to my past had caused.

"Who has done you wrong?" he asked.

"No one," I finally said.

"Then what is the anger in your eyes? Or, if it is not anger, what is the anguish I see?"

And then I knew that I was weak and selfish, because I had decided to preserve my life and my heart. At least it would be I who would end this love of ours that could never see a true fulfillment. We were living a lie, I convinced myself. Sooner or later it would all be over, and I did not want to be the one who was deserted.

*Besides*, I further persuaded myself, *he is strong enough. He can take care of himself.* Though I was betraying him, no one had ever seen Samson without his amazing strength—not even he. I didn't truly believe that there was any simple secret that would actually strip him of all his power. Perhaps it would lessen it. But I could not see him being as any other man.

I had grown so accustomed to his strength. And so had he; even more so. There was never a time in his life those many, many years that he had ever been without it. True, he had never in all those years broken the promise to God either. But when you have had something for so long, and have never paid the price of parting with it in a moment of foolishness, the reality of the consequences can often escape you.

That moment I made my decision. I thought it would be easier for me that way. And I was devoted entirely to preserving myself and my comfort and my pride. But I learned the hardest way of all that pride is the worst of all reasons. It will forever plague you and when you grow older and wiser, you will look back with remorse on those things you did with pride as your motivation. But love—love is a strange, but wonderful thing. It gives you power to do things brave and selfless, perhaps even deemed foolish or rash by others—because it is your heart that leads you. If I would have given my life and well-being for Samson, to preserve love instead of the pride, how different things would have been!

Resuming the anguished look and hiding the angry one, I responded, "While once I felt that our hearts were but a step away from beating as one, now I feel that they are further."

"What?" he asked, not quite understanding.

"It was as if they were so close to being as one, and now they are growing apart."

"Why are you so dramatic? Nothing has happened." He looked at my face, and my eyes lowered. He lifted my chin and looked me directly in the eyes. "Or am I wrong? Like I said, tell me who has done this."

"We have done this, Samson," I said quietly.

He laughed in disbelief. "What? What have we done?"

"We cannot grow any closer."

"Why?"

"Because we do not trust one another."

"Ah!" he said finally, as if he understood at last. "You want to know the secret of my strength. Very well then, if your heart is only, as you say, one step away from being part of mine, then I will tell you the secret."

My eyes lit up and I reached out and stroked his face.

"Tomorrow," he said at last, with a little chuckle.

"But that is so long to wait."

"There must be a price for being allowed to enter my heart. But if this will make you enter it more fully, then when you are in my heart, you will understand why I cannot tell you. Though I think that you should understand anyway. What if you betray me?"

"Samson!" I said, looking aghast.

He smiled. "I only jest. Now, while your heart might enter mine tomorrow, might I enter you now?"

## CHAPTER 6

I smiled and put my arms around him, kissing him. "Tomorrow," I whispered, though I merely jested.

He chuckled and put me off his lap, laying me down on the couch. "Since I am the stronger of us two, I say that it will be now." I said nothing, but in every way possible without saying a word, I let him know that I agreed.

*All is going well*, I thought. It seemed the struggle was over, but not for good. I hoped that when I had finally, through my fear and pride, made the horrid decision, there would be peace in my heart. But only for the briefest space of time. The struggle would be back, and I would have to face it alone. No Samson would be there.

But all this didn't enter my mind just now. I was busy loving and being loved with the strongest man the world had ever known.



“There is a woman here to see you,” Nor’s servant informed him. Nor was nigh asleep by the time I had arrived, and I knew he would be angry, but only until he found out what I had found out.

I shivered as I waited in the merchant’s front chamber for Nor. Samson had told me his secret, and we had, in celebration of our hearts being one, spent the hours afterwards in my bedchamber, in each other’s arms. Once Samson was asleep, I had crept out of the house to visit Nor, telling Jeila that if Samson should awake, to tell him that I had gone to the stream. Samson was unpredictable and I could not see Nor in the day unless I knew Samson was far, far away. I had to let Nor know that Samson had told me his secret.

The fact that his servant told him it was a woman who had come to see him prevented Nor from becoming more agitated. But when in the dim light he saw who the woman was, he was delighted.

“Delilah!” he exclaimed, mustering as charming a smile and comportment as he could at that hour.

“I have his secret,” I said casually, blocking out any more confusion and emotion that may have flooded my heart.

“You wicked little woman!” Nor joked. “You have served us well.”

Ekkor used to say something to that effect. I hated being congratulated for "serving" anyone.

"Well, do you want to hear it or not?" I said coldly.

"Of course I want to hear it!" he said, folding his arms and waiting with a smile of great expectation.

"He said that if he were bound with seven fresh bowstrings that were never dried, he would be as any other man."

"Did not we tie him with something before? I cannot remember what. Cords, perhaps. But you are saying he said fresh bowstrings in particular? Hmmm. Alright, will he be with you this morning before the sun rises?"

"He will. Send your men. Once he is bound I will have nothing to do with this."

"Of course. I will send men shortly. Will you wait?"

"No. I will be on my way." I had in fact planned to go to the stream that I had told Samson I swam in at night, and wet myself and my hair so that I would have a plausible excuse for my absence.

I turned to leave, then a thought came to me. I stopped and turned back towards Nor. "I would advise that your men hide in the house, and in my chamber, where I show them. And that they do not come out until they can see that he has told me the truth. Else it will be very terrible for them, for you, and for me. I will not be able to help you again then, because he will have known it was I who brought them."

"It will be as you wish. He will not awake?"

"His sleep is sound. I will tie him myself, and the men can wait. I will be at the door when they arrive."

"Very well," Nor said as he rubbed his sleepy eyes. "Why we did not think to avail ourselves of your abilities sooner, I know not."



I sighed and then turned and left. Once I was out of his house I ran as quickly as my legs would take me. It was some time before I reached my house, ran past it to the stream, threw off my garments and swam for just enough time to wet my hair and my body in its entirety. Then I dressed myself again and ran back to the house, waiting in the front chamber with a warm drink. I looked out the window every now and then, waiting for the band of men to arrive.

Arrive they did, and none too soon. I was quick to jump up and go to the door, as I had promised.

“The seven bowstrings,” one of them said, handing them to me.

I snatched them. “Men, you will follow me, extremely quietly and slowly. I will not have you tripping over any of the vases or ornaments of the house. Not only because they will wake Samson, but also because they will be hard to replace.—And it will come out of your pay.”

They grunted, careful not to make too much noise. I could tell they were happy to be a part of capturing Samson at last, but not happy to be under my instruction. We crept through the house and I hid them behind curtains and other places in my chamber.

“Now, remember,” I whispered as I showed them to their hiding places, “wait to see if he breaks loose from them. If he does, stay where you are. I’ll find a way to get him out of the house so you can leave without him seeing you, which is the only way you will leave.”

Samson lay comfortably on his belly, hands by his side and legs sprawled out, one hanging off the side of the bed.

I crept up onto the bed, careful not to wake him yet. I brought his hands together behind his back and bound them with two bowstrings. Then I

brought his legs together and tied the rest of the bowstrings about him. Samson slept soundly as he always did.

The sky was beginning to show signs that dawn was on its way.

"Samson! The Philistines be upon thee!" I said aloud and he jumped up with a start, the bowstrings breaking with no difficulty. He in fact did not even realize at first that he had been tied. Then he saw a broken strand still lingering on his foot, and shreds of bowstring all about on the bed and where he stood. He looked around alertly.

I laughed aloud, desperately hoping that none of the Philistine men I had hidden would be seen. I would not be sent to my death for one of their sneezes, coughs, or clumsiness.

"You nasty little woman," he said, fairly good-humored for being awakened so early in the morning in such a fashion.

I snuggled up to him. "I just wanted to see if you were telling the truth," I said, a smile painted on my face. "I knew you weren't."

"How?"

"Let me just say that you once knew that I wasn't telling the truth, about a certain veil. It was similar."

He laughed. "I am ashamed to be as poor a liar as you," he said, reaching over to touch my face.

"You are wet!"

"See, I did not lie about the swimming part."

"I know. And since you do well at telling the truth, perhaps you should now tell me one of your secrets."

"Perhaps not. I am tired. I swam for a long time, and you must have work to do today too."

"And I do. I must be off shortly, in fact."

I heaved a sigh of relief. I could get those men out.

“And you will return shortly to tell me the true secret. I am sorely offended, for you have mocked me.”

“And you have mocked me once by telling me tales of a certain veil,” he responded with a slight chuckle. “Now we two are even in our lies.” He kissed my forehead and then lay back down.

“Wake me when the sun comes up,” he said, his eyes closed. Soon he was fast asleep.

I, however, never went to sleep. I lay awake, worrying for the men around me, and not wanting to be dreaming should they make some wrong move and Samson be alerted to their presence. To my great relief, they kept their place and their stillness, and I woke Samson hardly an hour after the sun was up. He left quickly, and once he was gone the men left as well.

I had all day till he returned to think. That is, after I went to tell Nor what had happened, which I did almost immediately after he left and the men were out of the house by the back entrance.

“I am going to see Girad,” I casually told Jeila. “And I will go alone.”



“It was as I suspected,” I told Nor.

“But all is not ruined, is it?”

“No. Your men kept their places, and so it is not ruined. I will try again tonight. He will tell me—something at least. I will plead with him. So have your men prepared.”

“Very well.”

“But it is all chance,” I reminded him. “If he tells me an untruth today again, your men will have to stay silent until he leaves.”

“At your word, Delilah.”

For a moment I felt slight hesitation. “You will not kill him, will you?”

“I will not.” Sensing my hesitation, Nor

attempted to convince me further of the justice of our cause, and how we owed this to our people. He told me in gruesome detail how Samson had slain so many of our young men, and how he had brutal loyalty to his cause. Why shouldn't I betray him? He said that if I were to marry later, and my husband be among those that Samson fought, he would not spare him for me.

"He would!" I argued.

"Your love clouds your vision. It seems you have indeed learned to love after all," he muttered under his breath.

"What is this you speak of?"

"Love? Such a thing, though enjoyable to the dull populace, can be dangerous for those with talent, who must see beyond love that they might do what is best for their people."

"Don't talk to me about doing anything for my people," I snapped back. But inside he had further convinced me. I knew that I would always hold second place in Samson's heart. His first duty was to his God and to his mission, to his people. But as Girad had said so long ago, if I could not be stronger than he, then at least I could find out his weakness and strike him there.

I resumed the tone of efficiency. "Listen to me now. You must first send one man or two to my house some time this evening, so that when he will have told me the secret, if it involves something they need to get, then they can bring it to me. The men can pretend that they are looking for a relative who they heard lives in this place, so that neither Samson nor my servants will suspect anything of their presence. You need not worry about my servants; they are not loyal to Samson," I explained, anticipating Nor's concerns about that. "It is just better that people know little of what is happening. Then the other men can

return with the first, to set the trap once he is asleep.”

“What if Samson is not there, or what if he crosses their path?”

“The only ones who may cross his path are the two you will send earlier. And they should have their plans. Make sure they are not stupid,” I added the last sentence somewhat condescendingly. “If I do not know all, I will invite them in for a time and tell my maid to entertain them with food and drinks. They should stay not longer than four hours. If they see me again before these hours are over, they should tell Jeila they must be on their way. Then, when they bid me farewell, I will tell them what is needed. If the four hours are expired and they do not see me, we will have to try for the next night.”

“You are a clever woman. I hope my men do well.”

“Well, they must be careful. But once he is in the house, I will make sure he does nearly the same thing as he did last night. It should not be too difficult.”

“I hope you are as able as you look,” Nor said in a professional tone that was slightly tainted with his desire to flatter me that I might warm up to him.

“I am more able than I look. Just have your men ready,” I said and walked away.



Samson was late; he had told me he would be back by late afternoon. Though it was not dark, the first star was in the sky and still he was not there. The two men arrived soon, as I had expected. They introduced themselves to me and I had Jeila give them food while I waited, somewhat nervously, on my sofa on that delightful garden balcony of mine, with Samson’s favorite

food and fruits laid out nicely on the table in front of me.

I wondered if I should go and make conversation with the two men in the dining hall, and play the part of the hostess. But then I would have to ask them questions, and I was concerned that they may fumble their story. If they were alone, with only Jeila tending to them, they would be safe. She would ask no questions.

I jumped up when I heard Samson's voice and laughter downstairs.

"And Delilah has visitors! That is not so common these days."

I heard one man choking loudly on his food. I smiled to myself. They had not expected to be meeting him face to face when his strength had not yet been stripped from him.

"We have traveled a long way," offered one of the men. I frowned and immediately went to the dining hall to their rescue. I had to distract Samson before they ruined everything.

"Samson, you are late," I chided, standing on the steps that led from the hall and balcony down to the front chamber where they met. He turned and walked up to me, kissing me on the forehead, for I was at the perfect height a few steps up. "I am sorry. But you would be happy, for I met a relative of yours today." he whispered.

"Oh ... where?"

"In the marketplace, where they were trading items from caravans to other places. I didn't find out where."

"How did you know he was my relative, and who is it?"

"His name is Ekkor. I overheard him talking to his servants who were helping him to buy things. He mentioned your name several times as he was talking."

“What was he talking about?” I grew even more worried than I already was.

“About garments, ornaments of the hair, your great interest. They were looking at silver and gold ornaments, bracelets and the like. I think he may have been picking something out for you.”

Suddenly, for reasons that Samson knew not, I grew worried and blurted out, “What did you do to him?”

Samson smiled. “What did I *do* to him? Nothing, of course. I don’t slay innocent Philistines, only those who actively try to hurt my people—or me,” he added, with an “of course” statement written all over his face.

All this we had whispered to each other several feet away from the two men who I could see were both staring. I narrowed my eyes at them and they returned to their food.

“Come, I have food for you upstairs. Jeila has prepared all the foods you like most,” I said as calmly as possible, not wanting to show my nervousness and desperation.

“Jeila,” he said, for she just walked past. He reached out and took her hand and kissed it.

“Samson! She is a servant,” I whispered sharply.

“A most beautiful one as well,” he replied casually, and then his gentle eyes looked right into mine. “Not as beautiful as her mistress, though.”

I wanted badly to show my disgust, but I could not follow my whims just now. I crinkled my nose and touched it to his. “You are a wicked man!” I whispered, a cheeky grin pasted on my face.

He laughed. He had no idea that he had made me quite displeased just then. I sensed that he was getting distant—or perhaps it was my fear that he would that made me feel as if he already were distant. But of a truth, he was at the same place

he always had been. *I*, however, was growing distant. I had to. It would be torture to truly stay so close while I was in the act of betraying him.

"All right, I will come," he said.

We sat down on the balcony, and we began to eat.

"How kind of you to have Jeila prepare this for me."

I smiled. "And not only Jeila. I also helped to prepare it."

"You? You used your hands to work today?" He was in another one of those jesting moods. But I was offended.

"I see that you are not flattered," he said quickly. "But do you not merely sit around and wait for me to visit you, while in the meantime you listen to stories from that drunken friend of yours, Girad?" He had a broad smile on his face. I knew he meant no harm and was only engaging in nasty humor such as I often did.

Realizing I was not entirely in the mood, he attempted to repair the effect of what he had just said. In a more serious tone, he added, "No, I do not think that. I merely jest with you. I know that you have business with Girad, some spice trade. I am sorry I do not know the details of all that you do. But I know the details of other things about you, which I greatly love. And it is not for a woman of your class to be working so hard. You are only so feisty at times and so surrounded by men that sometimes I think you are as tough as they and should work as hard." With that, he laughed.

I smiled feebly.

"But tell me," Samson continued, "I see you are not in such high spirits. What is it that ails you?"

"You mocked me earlier this morn," I pouted.

"And no wonder I did, for you tried to capture me," he said, with a mischievous smile. "I could



not have myself prisoner to you in body too, who already holds my heart captive.”

“Not captive enough, for it will not allow itself to share the deeper secrets with me.”

He sighed and leaned back in his chair. “I told you that I would tell you at length. Can you not be patient?”

“Nay, I cannot wait to know the depth and height of your love for me.”

“And can you not tell me one of your secrets first?”

“I tell you, I have no secrets,” I pled.

“That I cannot believe.”

“Now you know one of my relatives—ask him for my secrets,” I said. It was a very foolhardy move, and the worst thing I could think of was Samson and Ekkor talking about my past. But it was the only thing that came to mind as something to say that would be a way of escape and to get him to tell me his secret. Besides, I knew he was not as obsessed with my secrets, and as a man would not go out of his way simply out of mild curiosity to hunt down a relative whom he hardly knew and ask him what my secrets were. But I had a job to do. And it was a matter of life or death—his and mine.

“Perhaps I believe you. But I will find them out one day,” he said with a wink.

We ate in silence for several more minutes. Then I asked again, “So now, will you tell me your secret?”

“Might we celebrate again for my honesty then?”

“We can celebrate now,” I said quickly.

“Very well then, let us go to the chambers,” he said, pushing away a bowl of food and standing up.

“You will not finish your food?” I asked, not wanting to show my anxiety in getting him to tell

me the secret. The two men were still down there. They were waiting for me to appear.

And just as I feared, Samson said as we were walking down the hall to my room, "Perhaps we should bid those two men farewell. I hear them still. They will be gone by the time..."

"No, Samson. They have traveled a long ways and are hungry. Remember, we have only been up here a short while. You did not even finish your food."

"It seemed much longer to me."

"I am sure it did."

We walked into my room and he collapsed on my bed, lying on his back with his arms behind his head. I came and sat atop him, brought his arms from behind his head and folded them across his chest.

"I wish that I for once could feel stronger than you."

"That would never happen—even if I lost all my strength. I would be as another man, and I think you are not stronger than a man."

"But I still wish that I could be. I could tie you up like this," I pretended to tie something about his arms.

"And would you tie my legs?"

"I do not know."

"What would you do while I was tied?" he asked with a cheeky grin. "Would that make you desire me more?"

That was a funny thought. I decided to agree. "Yes! It would. Then I would not tie your legs, so they would be the only things free to engage in some sort of loving with me."

He laughed aloud. "You are a very wild and strange creature. But even if you could tie my hands, and I could not break them free, if you did not tie my legs, I could still get away with ease."

I looked puzzled.

“Sit to the side now,” he instructed me and I got off of him and sat beside him on the bed. He lay there, arms still folded across his chest as I had positioned them. He turned with ease so that he was at an angle, his feet hanging off the bed. Without any struggle, he leapt to his feet.

“Any man could do that!” he said.

“So then I would tie your legs. Then you could not get up.”

“If I still had my strength, I could.”

“Then you would not be tied. But show me.”

Arms folded and legs together, he propelled himself off the bed so that in an instant he was standing beside the bed, still in the same pretend “tied” position. It all happened within a second.

“But I would rather break whatever you used to tie me. Then I wouldn’t have to get up.”

“Chains even wouldn’t hold you?”

He laughed.

“What would then?”

“Brand new ropes,” he said and looked me right into the eye with as serious an expression as I’d ever seen on him.

I took it that he meant that was his secret.

I was sure not to seem too happy. I could not afford to rejoice just yet, for there was no telling at this point whether he had told me another lie or not. I raised my eyebrows casually. “Ropes?”

“That have never been used,” he added.

I was not sure what else to say. I had accomplished my purpose for this day, but I had appeared to just be enjoying myself, without purpose, so far. I could not simply get up.

“Alright then, you have told me one of your secrets,” I began. “Now I shall tell you one of mine.”

He smiled knowingly, as if to say, “I knew they were in you somewhere,” and I played with the

folds of his garment as I began to speak.

"It is a secret, though I do not know if it is entirely true. But it is still a secret, for I have kept it from many."

"A secret lie," he mused.

"No," I said slowly. "A secret possibility."

His face grew very curious. "So tell me?"

I bit my lip in a joking fashion, hoping to play even more on his curiosity. He threw me down on the bed and started tickling me. I laughed and cried and pretended I wouldn't tell him. It was part of the act.

"Very well, very well!" I finally cried. I was under his weight, unable to move, while he tickled me torturously. "Get up off me!" I said, with a look that told him I was afraid to be pinned down while I was vulnerable.

"Not until you tell me your secret."

"It is no big thing."

"Oh, it is not the secret of *your* strength? How you hold my heart captive so well?"

I smiled tenderly then. "Samson," I said softly, stroking his long hair, which I loved to feel hanging down around me.

"Tell me," he whispered.

"Some say that my mother was one of your people, that she was taken by the Philistines and married to a Philistine, one of my people."

"Is this true?"

"I know not. My mother and father died, I told you, when I was young. And I have few relatives."

"I hope that foul man, Ekkor, is not the best of a few poor choices of relatives to be with?" he joked. "I am sorry, he only looks somewhat foul." He explained quickly. "Then you would be half my people and half Philistine."

I nodded.

"But I do not know if this is true, Samson," I

said. I had not expected much reaction from him, which is why I chose this safe secret, one that was merely a rumor, though it could have been true. Of a truth, I did not care. I only told no one because it was a disgrace to not be of pure blood in the class Ekkor had brought me up in.

“So you are not totally a stranger to my people,” he said, all this meaning a great deal more to him than to me. Normally it is possible I would have said that it did not mean that at all, because I had been raised a Philistine. But I reflected the tender look in his eyes. He kissed me gently, with great affection. Time was passing, and I was eager to have the men downstairs on their way to get the new ropes.

Thankfully, I heard some commotion downstairs. Something had fallen to the floor.

“What was that?” I asked.

“I’m sure Jeila can take care of it.”

“Wait here, I’ll go see.” I said. He rolled over and sighed.

I ran down the stairs. Jeila apologized that she had broken a plate. The two men got up and said they would be going. I saw them out to the door.

“Brand new ropes!” I whispered once we were outside the door. “They can’t have been used at all!” Then they left.



For all Samson’s usual skill in sensing the enemy and being alerted to ambushments, his love for me had clouded and dulled that. Besides, nothing unusual ever happened in my home and he had no reason to suspect that I, the one who was so hurt that he loved his people and his obligation to them and to the mission that God had given him more than me, would be the one to, in effect, point the dagger to his heart and have the audacity to hope he could save himself.

More often than not I was desensitized to the horrors of my predicament. My eagerness to find that weak spot of his and prey upon it relentlessly grew by the moment, and my heart that was so fearful of one day being rejected, turned cold so quickly. There was no more hesitation—not for now. I did my duty with chilling single-mindedness.

Somehow I had a perverse notion that having a duty once again—like Samson had, only so ignoble and lowborn a duty as compared to his—gave me strength, as though it put me on par with him. He had hurt my people, and perhaps one day he would hurt me—and so I stooped to hurt him in the lowest, meanest way. True, I had not come up with this atrocity myself, but I had agreed to it just the same. And for that I would pay in tears and heartache.

Ekkor and the lords knew by now that I had learned to love—and they watched in pleasant surprise, as well as horror, as their enemy was going to be brought low by the very one who had once believed that her heart was well nigh one with his.

But it was not a time for meditating on all this. There was something to be done. And I had to do it quickly before I changed my mind, or before Samson suspected and hell opened up and swallowed me in its foul mouth.

I sang quietly as Samson drifted to sleep. I stroked his locks, and once he was asleep I kissed him on the forehead and lay beside him. The soldiers would not be here for a little while.

When I thought he was sleeping soundly enough, I crept out of bed and went to the front chamber where I had not long to wait for the two men to arrive, with their armed companions. They brought the new ropes. I hid the men first within the chamber, as I had the night before. Then, as

they waited—and those who could, watched—I tied Samson as I had the night before.

Once I was done and had sufficiently calmed myself so that I did not appear too tense or excited, I said quickly, yet half-jesting for I was not sure if he had told me the truth this time, “Samson! The Philistines!”

He sat up quickly and the ropes instantly broke. He laughed and I pouted. “Samson, you have again lied to me. I wished so to have you bound up.”

He chuckled and then yawned. “I slept so well! You did disturb me greatly. Perhaps I shall have to punish you.”

I was slightly worried, but I knew it was only because I had done something far worse than merely wake him. If I had not been guilty of the worst crime, I would have anticipated his “punishment” with curiosity—even glee.

“This,” he took a broken rope from beside him, “will have to be tied about you.”

I gasped, “Samson!”

“You said this evening that you wanted me to be bound so you could do what? Remember what you said?”

“That I would tie your arms...”

“And what were you to do with my legs, eh?”

“Leave them free to...”

“You remember so well,” he said, laughing the entire time.

I started laughing as well, hoping to put the men who hid within the chamber at ease, lest they think something was awry and that I would lose the control that I’d had so nicely the night before.

“You are a wild, wild man,” I said, closing my eyes and turning my face this way and that to make it feel as if the long locks of his that hung down around me were stroking my cheeks.

“A perfect match for you, the wild woman,” he

said, stroking the length of my arms, which were now loosely tied above my head. If there had been any light in the room aside from the moonlight he would have seen my face turn very pale. I was not prepared to engage in some kind of intimate activity within the earshot—and for some, eyeshot—of my little band of men who were hidden within the chamber. I struggled, wondering what to do.

“What is it?” he asked suddenly and intuitively. I think I had shuddered not subtly enough. “What is wrong? You never hesitate.” He looked around the room and then into my eyes. I strove very hard to regain the calm I had moments ago.

“Samson, nothing is the matter. It’s the moonlight, casting weird shadows across my face. There is nothing more I want than you,” I said convincingly, my legs pulling his lower half toward me.

Samson smiled. “So the moonlight it is!—Your desire seems strong enough,” he said with a laugh, and then sank into my receptive body, burying his face between my neck and hair, kissing me and groaning softly.

“Ah, you are a wonderful, responsive lover, even when your hands are tied,” he laughed gently. When his face was busy nestling itself between my bosoms, or embarking on such kissing tours as he delighted to each time we loved, my eyebrows couldn’t help but knit into an expression of utter embarrassment, fear, anger and confusion.

“I know that the spice trade you have just embarked on with Girad must be weighing heavily on your mind,” he teased. “But forget all that for right now. Forget everything, Delilah,” he said.

Forget! How could I forget that there were a good many men hidden in my chambers, their ears witness to this intimate occasion—perhaps their



eyes if they had adjusted enough and were in possession of such a view? Something would have to flee this night, though—either my pride or my plans. And what a hefty price both of them presented, but at least the surrender of my pride would be less physically painful. I was normally such a wild lover with Samson, yet how could I be thus when there were other menfolk in my chambers?

But I knew that Samson's sense was normally keen, at least with regard to me. Why he had not sensed the presence of those men and my agreement to such cruel betrayal, I could not understand. Any moment I prepared myself for his discovery of all the wickedness. But his heart had grown relaxed and he trusted me—at last. And now I was betraying the love that only time had earned me.

Fearful that he would sense again my trepidation and not mistake anymore the wild pounding of my fearful heart for the passion that normally not only possessed my heart, but also every part of my body, I did all that I could to forget that there were twenty-some men in my chambers. Samson could not find out. And that was the last night we loved thus. It was wild. It was passionate. It was long.—Too long, under the circumstances. We would break for a short sleep, and then Samson would awake me and we would begin all over again, until the morning star was the only star left.

"We should sleep, my love," he said, eyes closed and head completely sunken into his pillow. I could not agree more! Needing some way to express my utter embarrassment at the feeling of being stripped bare in front of a crowd—not only of my clothing, but of any sort of dignity, as if one such as I could possess anything like that—I put my head facedown into my pillow and wished I would

never have to see those men again.

A few moments later, Samson's hand flopped itself on my lower back. I nearly jumped.

"I must go; business to tend to. I am a judge as well as your lover, you know," he said sleepily and then curved his hand round my waist and pulled me closer to him. I soon fell asleep. When I awoke, he was gone.

I wondered for a moment what business he had had to tend to. I had never dared to think too much about it before, for fear that my imagination would contrive some gruesome tale of him versus my people—an unworthy match indeed, my people throwing themselves headlong into the pool of defeat; a just punishment for their folly in standing against one sent from God's throne to deliver His people from my people's tyranny. I dismissed the question almost immediately as it came. He would be out of my life soon; why should I care?

The men, still hidden to this moment, did well to stay in their places until I was dressed and ready to dismiss them. I would not have them come out whilst I was still under the security of my linens alone. It was a terribly undignified position for one such as I. And I would take my time readying myself before doing them the justice of dismissing them.

By and by I was ready, and told them quietly to come out of where I had placed them the night before. My wicked countenance told them that I would have no looks and not a word. They went out the same way they had come the night before.

I could not have this happen again. Not this way. I would not have guests in the privacy of my bedchamber where I could not predict what would happen. My heart had been slave to Samson's passion as long as we had been together, and how could I tell him things were not as they were? What

## CHAPTER 7

excuse would I give? And once he knew that things were not as they were, his heart too would build around itself a wall and then I feared, then, he would sense immediately that all was not as he had thought.

I spoke to Nor and told him that the men, and some ladies, could come to my house for a party. The ladies were not to know the reason for all this. They could be whores for all I cared, I told Nor. But then the men would be within the house, and yet not run the risk of being discovered, should Samson sense that all was not right. Nor agreed and the plans were set in motion.



- 8 -

“Greetings, Jeila!” I was in my room when I heard Samson’s voice at the front door. “Is your mistress resting?”

“No, she is weaving.”

“Is she?” I heard him give a gentle laugh, and then chuckle as he walked towards my room. “Seems the woman has decided to work after all.”

I rolled my eyes as I worked the loom. I quickly painted a pleasant expression on my face when I saw him come to the door.

“Working?” he said with a sly smile.

“I do this often. You’ve just never seen me weaving, that’s all.”

He came and stood behind me, attempting to share some of his relaxation with me by rubbing my neck and shoulders.

This further irritated me, but contrary to my feelings I leaned my head back against him and gave a long sigh.

“Every now and then I do this when I need to think.”

“What does a beautiful woman like you have to think about?”

“A lot of things,” I said, bringing my head up from leaning on him and resuming my work. Before he could come up with some other smart rejoinder I added, “Besides, it brings me peace.”

"And peace makes you look so forlorn," he concluded, lying himself down on the sofa opposite me.

"Why did you come here, Samson?—To torment me?"

He looked at me and cocked an eyebrow. "Is this what you will say to me when I come at last to tell you my secret?" he teased.

"Ah! Forgive me. I had almost forgotten about that secret," I said, getting up from the loom and sitting beside him on the sofa.

He gave a wicked smile and said nothing for a moment. Then he reached over, grabbed me and tickled me so hard I let out a terrifying scream—it was partially an angry and irritated scream, but not that I would not have screamed if I were in the best of spirits. Samson laughed quietly.

We heard Jeila's footsteps coming towards the room, so I began laughing.

"You terrified her! She came running to see that everything was all right," Samson grinned.

"You terrified me! Why did you come, anyway? Did you sense that I was to prepare a party this night? You left so early this morning, I did not have time to tell you."

"I finished my business early, and so I have come to my second home. If you have a party planned this night, it is just as well then that I am here."

"Your second home? Where is your first home? You have never taken me to your home or..."

"...told you of my secrets."

"Yes, that too," I replied nonchalantly, as if I had lost interest in that and was now onto something new.

"You appear to show no interest, but I know that your wish to know is nearly as powerful as my strength."

I said nothing, though I wondered if his God had given him a glimpse into my wicked thoughts.

“Why do you really want to know of my strength, Delilah? Tell me, in all truth. Is it as you say?”

“Would there be any other reason?” I said, as sincerely as I could.

He said nothing for a moment, though I knew a few thoughts had passed. He looked deeply into my eyes and then down at my sash and began fidgeting with it.

“I suppose not,” he said quietly. The mood had changed entirely.

I lay the whole of myself on him and nudged his chin so that he would lift his eyes towards mine. “I want only to know that you trust me. I have never allowed anyone to come so close as you. I want to know that I am trustworthy, that I mean enough to you.”

He put his arms around me and held me for a very long time. I knew a great struggle was going on in his mind, and he had not decided yet whether he would tell me. Until he decided, he knew there was nothing to say. I could almost feel the painful memories as he relived them. I felt distant as he remembered the betrayal and hurt that had been brought to him by one who had held his heart before like I did now. There was another woman then, another life that he had lived through, before he ever knew me. And I wondered if—just as he learned to love again after Lilia—something would happen between us and one day I would fade into a distant, painful past, while he went on to love another.

He must have decided at length that the melancholy air was much too thick for him. A slow smile spread across his face as he looked into my droopy eyes—all my worried feelings spilled out onto my face. I thought that I had perhaps

persuaded him this time, but I was not sure.

“You must not make yourself sick through worrying about my love for you. You know that you have it.”

“I want your trust as well,” I answered. “It is part of love, is it not? But I can wait until you are ready. I would not have you hate me for this.”

“I would not hate you for wanting my trust. I would never hate you for that.”

I didn't dare ask him what he would hate me for. I knew the answer. Even then I wondered, in a morbid way, whether he would hate me fiercely and angrily, or whether he would simply be hurt by it and not know how to retaliate. I knew that hurt was not a simple thing; I had never known pain like he had, but yet I feared it even more than he.

Something in his eyes told me he had decided something. Whether he had decided that he could trust me or not, I was unsure.

“It is strange how life can be so full of little signs, is it not, my pretty little Delilah?”

“What do you mean?”

He looked over at the loom. My expressive eyes looked so hungry for whatever he was going to say. If it was the secret, they would eat it up like two ravenous beasts. If it wasn't, they would fight to hide their hunger.

I could almost swear a small smile crept across his face for a moment, as if his eyes were begging in advance for forgiveness for this cruel little trick. He could not bring himself to trust me yet.

He looked over at the loom.

“What are you trying to say, Samson?” I asked, not wanting to point everything back to the secret.

“You want to know the secret? It is odd that you have brought the very tool here this day, and that I saw you for the first time at it. I would not think



it was anything extraordinary, but ... perhaps this is the moment to tell you.” He looked at me knowingly.

I feigned a slight look of wonder, as if I was in another world and hadn't quite understood him.

“Your ... secret?” I said at length. Then I gave a look of sincere disbelief and hesitation. “Oh Samson, if you do not want your secret to be in danger, do not tell me. Perhaps I will be threatened like your wife.”

“I think my only threat is you trying it!” he laughed.

I smiled and gave him a look that said I hoped he wasn't angry with my childish behavior.

By now I was sitting on his belly, my legs astride. He squeezed my hips.

“Perhaps this is the day to tell you, for you have brought the loom here, and it may be a sign that you are trustworthy.”

I was not so superstitious, but if that was what he needed to tell me the secret, I was happy.

“See if you might guess the secret. It has something to do with the loom.”

“I'm afraid you do this for sport, Samson. You have told me lies all this while, and made me to look the fool.”

He laughed. “That is entirely your doing. You would not be the fool if you would not keep trying the secrets I tell you. Just take this one and cherish it, and let it bring us closer, like you say you wish for it to.”

What I did not know was that he had purposed in his mind that if I didn't try the secret, then he would indeed trust me with the truth, and if I did, then he would not. A decision that would have saved his life, had he not later recanted.

I smiled. I could not promise that. I would not, otherwise I would look like a liar if I did try it and

find he had fooled me again.

"Guess," he encouraged me, "for I am a tired man and the true reason I came is because I must sleep."

"You are such a sleepy creature."

"Do not condemn me! Makes good time for sport for you, does it not? Tying me up and the like," he grinned. "You could not do such things when I was awake." He laughed, seeing the mock offended look I wore.

"Guess!" he said again.

I thought hard. I felt clever soon enough. "Ah! Your hair must be weaved into the loom, like the strands are!"

"Did an angel tell you this?" He tickled me again, only this time I did not scream; I laughed, good-naturedly, denying it.

"Then perhaps you were meant to know."

Somehow I did not believe him. I decided I would try anyway, being that at least he would be weaker and then perhaps someone would catch him. I did not know how long it would weaken him, or what the conditions were. I had been playing this game for so long and decided to try once more whether or not the conditions were perfect. At least I could tell Nor if it was true.

I leaned over and looked into his eyes, stroking his hair with my right hand.

"That is not the entire secret," he said, looking straight into my eyes.

"What is the rest?"

"You must weave these seven locks of my hair into the loom—no more, no less," he said, untying the seven braids that lined his forehead and holding them up for a moment while I played with the rest of his hair, only glancing at the braids from of the corner of my eye for a brief moment.

It was almost as if he was giving me instruc-

tions. I found that odd. Perhaps it was just because I was taking his words down as if they were instructions, for I was about to follow through on every last one of them. I was jolted back to some form of reality when I remembered he had asked me to cherish it. And, as if he had been given a glimpse into my mind just then, he asked me again:

“So will you cherish this?”

I nodded, and placed a soft kiss on his lips. He returned it with as much tenderness, and then startled me by squeezing my waist suddenly.

“You disrupted a tender moment, my Samson!”

“I told you—I must sleep,” he said with a wink. Somehow I knew then that the odds were great that he had not told me the truth, but I was committed to trying anyway. I was sure that after having known him for so long, I would know whether the strength had left him. I obediently got off him and went back to my loom. He fell asleep within minutes.

I went and got Jeila and one of the servants to help me move the loom closer to where Samson lay. As he slept, I took the seven braids as he had instructed and wove them into the strands of the loom, hoping that weaving all his hair would break the spell better than weaving only some of his hair.

I closed the door quietly and then made my now familiar cry, “Samson! The Philistines!” He did not jolt up. Rather, he sat up as if he had expected this to happen—and what man wouldn’t, after a woman had tried everything like I had. He hardly looked at me, nor jested as he had before. He simply walked out of the room, the pin and the loom dangling from his hair, tearing at it, but not breaking it—with the remainder of the fabric that I had woven dragging behind him. I was surprised that it did not even seem to weigh on him, and I

was frightened for a moment that he might hurt me out of anger and frustration. Truly, I think he wished that I had cared enough to let him sleep, and was disappointed that I had not earned my trust by cherishing the secret rather than annoying him with another attempt. He would have told me that it was a lie later, had I simply believed and kept it close to my heart like he had hoped I would.

I dared not leave the room for some time. I sat upon the couch he had just been sleeping on, and which was still warm from his body. I curled up onto the couch, soaking up the warmth in a strange, sentimental way, contradicting the fact that I was about to cold-heartedly betray him. I fell asleep for some time, forgetting about the party we had planned for that night. I was not sure he would come tonight. If he did, I was also not sure I could get another secret out of him so soon, but I hoped for the best. I could not cancel the party now.

When I awoke I went straight to the front steps. I saw the loom, the pin, and the cloth, all thrown in a heap on the ground at the bottom of the steps. I looked closer and saw the little strands of hair that were scattered here and there, probably lost in his attempts to disentangle the loom from his hair, rather than from the weight of the loom itself.

"What kind of strength is this?" I said aloud. I got one of my servants to gather up the loom and all that was strewn there, and bring it back to the room. I wondered if Samson would come to the party, or whether he was tired of me and my tricks and would not come back for some time.



I knew not whether it was his forgiveness or his good-naturedness that brought him to the party that night. But whatever his reasoning, he came. When he arrived the house was decorated with

foods delightful to the eye and to the taste. Well-dressed Philistine men, some young and some older, mingled with women whose demeanor told of their occupation.

He seemed to have forgotten completely about our encounter earlier that afternoon. However he had managed to untangle the loom from his hair, it was now neatly arranged again—more neatly than I had been accustomed to seeing of late, perhaps because the untangling of it had necessitated a greater tending to than he would have normally given his lengthy locks. “I knew not this party would be such a grand occasion,” he said, tension crawling through his body.

“I take it you are ... pleasantly surprised then?” I questioned, as charmingly as I possibly could.

He took me into his arms. “You always pleasantly surprise me,” and he kissed my forehead.

He looked around. “So many men here.”

“Perfect company. They truly know how to enjoy themselves.”

“And I see that you’ve brought a few women to make sure of that,” he said, winking at one of the ladies that stood by.

“Of course! Men must have something to enjoy,” I said quickly, hoping that my thoughts had not made me look as far away as I really was in my mind.

“And so what is it we should do? I am rather tired.”

“Mighty judge of Israel, tired?” I dared not mention anything about his short nap, lest that unleash some unhappy mood.

He only nodded. Then I noticed a few scratches on his arm that I had missed entirely. “What happened to you, Samson? Another fight? You must tell me all about it.”

## BETRAYAL

He looked at me seriously and still tenderly, "We had agreed not to speak of these things."

"You are right," I agreed, not caring anyway. I had a plan to fulfill, and that was my great preoccupation. I was terribly intrigued with his behavior, as he had said nothing after my last attempt and would say nothing of it now either. I had almost hoped he would be angry. That would have made my betrayal of him much easier. But he gave me no such assistance.

"Well then, shall we go up to the privacy of my chambers?" I said with a naughty, tempting look. While I waited for him to answer, I wondered if he was trying to figure out why I had not brought up the subject of the loom and the pin, or apologized. Perhaps he was happy not to have to discuss it. I hoped that was true, for I was frightened at what sort of scene it might inspire. I couldn't remember if I had ever seen him display as much spectacular strength before my eyes as he did that afternoon.

Samson laughed. "Oh, we can stay here for some time. This looks enjoyable enough," he said, his eyes fixed on one of the women there who stood in the center of the room, dancing for the men who were gathered about in a circle. Samson and I slipped in beside some of the men, and Samson heartily clapped as the damsel danced freely and quite sensually to a tune the musicians played. Samson had great appreciation for women and their beauty. He laughed, feasted and drank merrily while I stood by the side, pretending to enjoy it all and take my time.

Samson drew me closer and put his arm around me. Some of his long locks brushed against my face and I closed my eyes and rubbed my face against them. Somehow it brought back a sense of partying to me. Either that, or my mood had coincidentally changed just that second.

“Bring another round of drinks for everyone, Jeila!” I called out merrily. “You are such a joyous bunch you all deserve another drink!” I called out to the rest of our company.

Everyone cheered. Jeila quickly brought drinks, with the help of another servant. Once everyone had their drinks, one of the older men raised his cup in the air.

“To Delilah, our fair hostess!”

“To Delilah!” everyone chorused. I smiled, laughed, and then looked up at Samson and kissed him. He chuckled and raised his cup belatedly. Then he put his cup to mine.

“To love and trust!” he said, in reference to our now fairly frequent exchange with regard to secrets. The world stopped for me that moment. The last word came piercing through my heart like a dagger.

For a second I wondered if this was his own sort of revenge, striking at my heart and trying to see if he could disappoint or hurt me as I had him. His disappointment in me showed me one thing—that he wanted to love me completely, trust me completely. That knowledge was worse than any revenge he might have taken for my disappointing him and betraying his trust in little ways. And then I knew he loved me more deeply than I had realized. He could not help his love for me—it was so noble, so tender.—And here I was striking at the very heart of it. I felt so wicked, so cruel. I was truly the ignoble one, the unworthy one. How could I live with such tenderness, knowing what I had purposed in my heart to do?

Slowly I forced my cup up to his, and timidly looked up. When my eyes met his, the world started again. Only it seemed to spin round me—first slowly, then more quickly. I felt light and faint in my head. I swooned. Those who noticed gasped,

but Samson caught me in his arms, excused himself quickly and instructed them to party on. Then he carried me up to my bed and laid me gently down.

I had not fainted entirely, but my whole body shivered and felt as cold as death. I was afraid to open my eyes lest I find his gazing into them, killing me over and over again with his love.

*My poor Samson, you have never had much luck with women, have you?* I thought to myself, my eyes closed. I knew he was close beside me, because I could hear him breathing, each breath followed by a beat of my pounding heart. Sometimes Samson would grow tender in the span of a few moments. And so it was as he laid me down and looked upon the fair form of the one he loved. While my eyes were yet closed, he began to whisper, and the words were so eloquent, as if they had been written.

“I shall not wake thee yet, Delilah. But I feel painfully drawn to you. You spoke a truth when you said that our hearts were meant to be as one, beating as one. My trust was betrayed once by the one dearest to me, yet I know she meant not to do me harm. She was threatened. Despite that strength which I possess, I have not been able to guard my heart from the harshest blows and wounds that it has suffered at my own hand. Perhaps if I were wiser in my love, if I did not love with the whole of my heart, the whole of myself, then such painful memories would not belong to me now. I was afraid to love so wholly again. But you have helped me find that it was nothing to be feared. And so I think that at last, our two hearts may be almost one.”

I knew he spoke his heart. Crushed by the thought of how severely this act of mine would hurt him, I softened for a moment. Surely the confusion in my mind, the confusion that came whenever I



became once again indecisive, would part and I would find some way out? I felt threatened on either side. I saw no escape; I was blinded by my fear. He too was afraid, but he was reaching out. I knew he had reached out to the wrong person, that I was not worthy of him.

But the Delilah that I had been all along could not stand idly aside, feeling so unworthy, like the pitiful people I despised. I thought I owned the world, and yet when I stood beside Samson I felt like I was the slave, the bound one. I could never live that way! I could never feel unworthy and weaker than he. My hurt turned to anger. So quickly I was again overwhelmed with hatred toward him for how he had made me feel.

I did not open my eyes, hoping that he would speak more.

“I have bared my heart before you now, yet I am afraid I am still a coward, for I can only tell you these words whilst you are asleep. I have thought so many times of telling all this to you, but fear held my heart. The day I can tell you all my heart and not fear your fiercely strong green eyes that look so deeply into mine—that is the day that I shall be free indeed. A strong man I am, the strongest a man of ordinary stature can be perhaps, but the strength does not run over into my heart.”

I breathed deeply. My eyelids moved. I thought to give him warning before I “awoke,” so that he would not feel caught unawares and thereby withhold the deepest secret of his heart, the only secret in fact that I longed to know—the secret of his strength.

Opening my eyes, I found myself looking into his. Just as I had feared. His gentleness towards me shone through his eyes like bright beams of midday sunlight. I smiled demurely.

"What happened?" I murmured.

"Perhaps you drank too much too quickly," he said with a laugh. He was not the same man that had moments earlier told his heart to me while I feigned sleep.

I closed my eyes again and stretched. "Perhaps. ... And where is my drink now?"

He laughed, and so did I. "You learn so slowly," he said playfully. In this time of confusion, everything he said reminded me of myself or my past, and I grew increasingly sensitive and paranoid. Everything meant something to me.

"You could have mine, but I left it at the party when you swooned."

I smiled and placed a kiss not so tenderly on his cheek. "Let us return to the party," I said, attempting to get up. It was truly a fainting of the mind that had bid my legs give way, and now somehow I had suddenly recovered. Odd it is indeed how when left unattended one's own heart and feelings can drive this way and that, taking no obvious course and following no apparent schedule.

He put a firm hand on my thigh, and then pushed my shoulder back down to the bed.

"You are not well. Rest now, and I shall keep you company," he said.

"I am well enough. I cannot be an ill hostess."

"But you clearly are—ill, that is."

"I shall not be ill to my guests," I countered defensively. "You cannot stop me from returning to my party. I have always done as I wish, and I always will."

"Perhaps, but if God does not want you to do a thing, no matter how small it is, you will never be able to do it. By the same token, if God wills that you do something, no matter how impossible it is, by His might you *can* do it. With Him even impossible things are made possible."

“Like your strength,” I said as I reached over and squeezed his flexed arm.

“Indeed. If God had not willed it, I would be as any other. And then sometimes I do truly wonder ... were we all in fact made with such strength to begin with and then God—Who only would know the reason why--has through nature placed on us such limitations, perhaps that we might better know His strength? And as such, perhaps I am in fact not strong at all, but He bends the sureties of nature for me only so that I might do that which is otherwise impossible and fulfill the mission for which I was born.” The tone of voice and the way he spoke was so different, so thoughtful and pensive.

“Samson, my mind is not fit for questions of such depth as you seem to have plunged to,” I said, with a quizzical look.

“No, no, there is no deep thought here,” he smiled. “But it is a rather fascinating question, is it not?”

“To me it is rather simple. You are strong; we are weak. Because you fight our people, they hate you.”

A moment of silence followed. I wished I had said nothing.

“Would you also hate me had you known before you met me what I meant to your people?”

My eyes lowered. I knew not what to say. I had not a heart full of pure and passionate love to draw from anymore. Though somehow I wished I could still love him, I had shut the possibility quite out of my mind. So for a moment I struggled for words.

“I cannot speak of that which has not happened, but I know what the events as they have happened have made me feel,” I said, somewhat cryptically.

“And what does your heart feel?”

“It feels overcome with the very thought of you.”

I chose my words carefully.

He smiled, put his face to my bosom and closed his eyes as if to savor the moment.

“Lie beside me, my giant,” I said, attempting to pull him up onto the bed.

“And what of returning to the party, to grace your guests?”

“They will party into the night with or without me, like true Philistines.”

“Ah, my own people know how to party as well!”

“Yes, you have many traditions that you celebrate. I have heard of them.”

“Indeed we do. More than your people, I believe.”

“True, yet my people find nearly every gathering a festive occasion.”

After several moments of silence, Samson spoke again. His mind seemed to be on very personal and serious matters this night, though he was never too serious to enjoy hearty laughter and merriment.

“Was it yesternight that you told me that your mother may have been one of my people?”

I nodded.

“It seems like longer ago, but though it was a rumor, there may have been some truth to it. This possible truth would not leave my mind. It mattered little how oft I told myself that, just as it might have been true, it could also be untrue. Somehow, the thought that you were not entirely the daughter of the people who are my people’s enemies, but that the beginning of your life may have been lived in the womb of a daughter of my people, put yet more trust in my heart.”

I marveled at how this man who normally had not too many words to say suddenly began to speak of such secret things of his heart and the deeper thoughts of his mind with such eloquence. If all this had happened days earlier, my heart would

have been won entirely by his confessions of love. But I had done too much now, and all his tenderness made me hate myself more, and in turn hate him for it. This and hearing once again how my people were his enemies, I convinced myself yet again that our love would truly never work and if I was to survive it, I must be the one to kill it.

"It means a great deal to me as well," I lied. "It is my secret," I hinted. He just smiled.

Suddenly I decided to do away with the cautious game I was playing and beg—beg him to tell me his secret. I had tried to tread so carefully, not to anger him, but to lure him. I wildly flung myself at another chance to ask him directly. I lowered my eyes and fixed them on my fidgeting fingers, hoping that if I did not look in his eyes, he would not sense the wickedness that I was carrying out for my vile lords.

"And you must tell me yours now, Samson. See ... see what the telling of my secret has borne in your heart? Would you not give me your secret that the same depths of affection might be borne in my heart?"

Samson cringed. "My love, you must understand that my secret reaches farther than yours, however precious yours is. And you are right that it did not pass over my ears and not enter my mind and heart. Mine will also not only pass over your ears and be forgotten. And this is what I fear. Only my father and mother and I have known this secret, for it was a messenger of God who told it them. And they in turn told it me. I have promised that one day I shall tell it you."

"And why cannot this be the day? I have loved you long and have spoken to you of my heart and my love, can you not trust one so dear to your heart?" I was desperate that another night not pass.

"I know not. My secret could be used against me and then the purposes of God would be thwarted. Unlike many, I was born knowing my purpose. To throw it away would be foolish."

"Telling the one you love of your secret you call throwing it away? Have I also thrown the secret of my heart away by telling it to you?"

"You are tiring my patience," he said at long last. Though he did not look impatient, I saw that he would be soon. But perhaps that is what he needed to drive him to tell me.

I was silent. There was nothing I could say in response.

Samson sighed. "I mean no harm to your heart, but the secret which you told me, I must remind you, bears not the consequences that mine does."

"But not all are given a secret by God that holds the key to their success. Some, like I, have no deeper secrets to tell. I know you believe me not, but what can I do? Shall I wrong someone or harm them that I might then have a secret to tell and thereby earn your great trust?"

Samson sighed again.

I forced a tear out of my eye. I was desperate enough and impatient enough that it was not difficult. I wished I could have cried anyway, I wanted so much for this lie that I was living to be over, and for the discomfort I felt at seeing his sincerity alongside my deception to end.

He turned to look at me and I pretended to turn away as if I was ashamed to weep in his presence. His protectiveness overwhelmed him.

"Oh, do not weep. It is no sign that I do not love you," he assured.

"Then what sign is it?" I sobbed.

He halted for a moment. "Perhaps a sign that I do not take my obligations to my God lightly."

"Does your God not understand love?"

“He did make it, for He made all things.”

“Then surely He will understand how much a part of love it is to share one’s heart. Unless...”

Samson looked at me expectantly, waiting for whatever it was I was about to say. I waited a moment for emphasis.

“Unless you do not love me as you say you do.”

Samson grew weary of this. “I have spoken of this to no one all my life, and you press me beyond measure. Not a night has passed that you have not asked me, and that is not all! You have tested me in each thing!”

I said calmly with a coy smile, “I am so sorry, my love! I could not resist the thought of my strong man bound up, not able to resist my loving.”

“I am already not able to resist your loving,” he said affectionately.

I blushed. “So will you not tell me this now?”

“I shall...”

I waited, wide-eyed with anticipation.

“...tell you when I deem the time right.”

I sighed. “Have I not shown my great interest in the deep things of your heart by imploring you thus?”

“Ah, do not fool yourself. There are many who have no interest in the deep things of my heart who have begged me to tell them this secret. It is a secret of great value, for which the Philistine lords would pay anyone a great sum to tell, I am sure. And this is why I am careful. I do not wish to place so great a responsibility and necessity of loyalty upon your shoulders, for it is this secret that the deliverance of my people depends on.”

“But you know that I am not as they! We loved in this bed for many a night! We have loved in our hearts even when we were apart. I have given you my self and...”—I dreaded to say it—“...my heart. Will you give me less?”

Samson sighed. He turned away for a moment, and I knew his thoughts were deep and far, thinking of whether he should tell me his secret. I could almost hear the messengers of God on one side calling to him, "Tell her not! Tell her not! For the enemies of your people have entrapped her and bid her betray thee!" And on the other side I could hear the Devil's minions crying out, "Tell her! How can one not trust her whom he says he loves? There is no harm done!" And I knew not still what he would do.

Then somehow he was deceived. He turned to me, with all the tenderness of his heart showing on his face. And not only that, but the look of one who is giving a precious possession to one who could never know its value, who pled carefulness but who he did not know if he could trust fully. He hoped that his heart had spoken aright.

"When the messenger of God did come to my mother and father, he told them that I was born to be a Nazarite<sup>1</sup>, consecrated unto God from the womb. No razor was ever to come to my head," he said quietly. I looked at those rich long locks that I had so grown to love. They had earned my adoration, as had his eyes. In these quiet strands of hair did lie the secret of his strength—in that thing which I so adored in a subconscious way, lay the secret of my lover's strength.

I was so overcome with relief (for I knew for certain that he had this time told me his heart), with guilt and also with fear for what was to come, that tears came to my eyes. I knew that I must appropriate them.

I wiped the tears gracefully from my cheeks and eyes. Then I closed my eyes and lifted my face up to his and kissed his lips. I told the one most

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<sup>1</sup> see endnote: Samson, the Nazarite



outrageous untruth willfully then. "I shall keep this secret close within my heart—and my heart only."

"And you shall not attempt to test this secret as you have the others, for I have spoken my heart. Take my word for it."

"I shall take your word for it, my love. You would not be the same without these," I said, weaving the locks about my fingers.

We lay there peacefully in each other's arms for some time. Then I arose. Had I not numbed my heart and refused to acknowledge the torrent of emotions and confusion that longed to overtake me, I would surely have broken down this time. But my heart had turned cold and I would not let it be warmed by anything—even the most tender of Samson's words and expressions of love.

"Where are you going?"

"To fetch us wine. Will you drink with me?"

"Never more gladly, my love."

I rushed quickly down to where the party was carrying on. I looked for the leader of the men and told him, "This night you must come up at the appointed hour, for he has told me all his heart this once!" He nodded and informed me that he would tell the others.

"Jeila!" I called from the stairs where I stood graceful and deliberate, yet trembling within. "Bring me a pitcher of wine."

Jeila bobbed her head respectfully, picked up the nearest pitcher of wine and brought it to me, her head low. I took the pitcher of wine and walked up those steps, each step bringing me closer to the moment when I would finish the act of preying heartlessly upon the weakness of the one who had finally given his trust to me.

Yet the grace in those steps belied the terror I knew would fall upon me once I was pulled out of this daze. I already trembled; what would become

of my heart and my spirit once the deed was done? Would I ever be able to live with myself again? And yet strangely enough, as I asked myself these questions, it was as if I was not one soul, but two—one asking the other the questions. And while the one trembled and shook and even wished it could think clearly enough to find a way out, the other walked mindlessly forth to do the deed.

When I returned to the room Samson was asleep. I knew that he would have to sleep more deeply than normal for me to put the razor to his head and remove those locks that I loved so dearly—the long strands that together wove the secret of his strength. How God does use the smallest of things at times to be the keys to His greater things! And how in a moment of foolishness we can lose the key.

I sat beside him on the bed and awoke him with a smile. “My Samson, you were not patient enough to wait for the wine!”

He rubbed his eyes. “You are right, my love. And where is it now? I am still impatient for it—and for you,” he took both my legs in his one hand and pulled me closer beside him.

“No, no, no,” I chided. “We must drink first! This is a party, remember? It cannot be the same as any other night—we must add excitement to it.” Pictures flashed in my mind of the trauma that awaited him, the cruel ending of his great mission, the promise of deliverance to his people crushed and the fragments lying helplessly at my feet. Could they ever be put together again? My display of spontaneity and severely accurate portrayal of myself as I always was could not have been more perfect. Samson did not detect anything—at least not enough to imagine what lay just a few steps ahead of him.

He chuckled. “Excitement, eh? Very well then, pour me some.” He lay back against the abundance

of pillows and heaved a sigh of relaxation. I gave him drink and he did so quickly. We drank and drank for almost an hour, laughing and talking about nights we had spent together, things we had done.

“Your stream! We should visit your stream tonight!” Samson suggested. “It would be the perfect night for a swim.”

“Ah, not this night. We have guests.”

“And you are not with them.”

“Yes, but a hostess should always be nearby lest the guests need something, and also to dismiss them when they leave.”

“Of course. You are the perfect hostess, among other things.”

“Plus you are a drunken fool tonight,” I joked.

“And you,” he laughed, “are fool enough to be in my presence while I am so drunken. Who knows what your man of strength might do to you!”

I giggled and sipped more wine. I had moved the pillows away from the side of the bed that I sat on, and leaned against the wall. Samson, who loved pillows, had them heaped up together and was as comfortable as a king in the midst of them. He got this sudden inspiration to move his head near to my lap so that in his comfort I could also be stroking his long hair—something that, among other things, it would be my last chance to do. This I did once the wine ran out, and while I chattered away he fell into a deep sleep. The noise of partying still carrying on downstairs, I quietly got up and went to find myself a razor from the room where the servants kept all sorts of cleansing and grooming equipment. Samson stirred but he did not wake.

I hid the item in some folded linen and walked downstairs to where I knew the captain of the men would be watching for me.

“He sleeps now,” I whispered, trying to make sure my face looked as joyous and hostess-like as possible, that the atmosphere would not change when the others looked at us. The others would know when the time was right.

Even though all who were at the party, save the women, were here for the express purpose of capturing Samson once his weakness was revealed, the prevailing air had to be one of partying. Samson’s senses were so keen that I feared if the mood would change from the joyful sound of spontaneous merriment to a quieter tone of intense planning, Samson may awake and we would all have spent our last night at this party. We were determined not to underestimate him, as I’d learned some had done in the past and had not lived long enough to regret.

“Within the next several moments, some of your men should creep up to the entrance of my chambers, but only a few. When you hear me shout, ‘Samson, the Philistines be upon thee yet again!’ wait to see if you hear me laugh. If I laugh, which I will do straightway if I do, it means that it is as the other nights and he has still not told me his heart. But if I laugh not, enter the room and seize him. And then ... and then think of me! For he bid me not try this secret on him and so I will suffer great punishment even if it is not the secret.

“Send the damsels away now, with a few of the men if you wish; I care not so long as we have enough men to take hold of Samson. If the few men who await outside my chamber do not return downstairs within the next few minutes, and you hear no sound of death, the rest of the men should come up as well. If I laugh, the few will return downstairs hastily and we shall have to beseech...” I hesitated a moment, reminded of how Samson spoke of beseeching his God. Then I added quickly,

“...beseech Dagon, for I know not how much longer I can employ this foolish tactic of pretending it is a joke.”

The captain nodded. “I shall spread word quietly. The men who are to send the damsels away know of this. I shall signal them.”

I nodded curtly and then hurried back up the stairs. Then I turned around and whispered, “Your men must not be a moment too late! If he has indeed lost his great strength, he will still be as strong as any other man and could very well kill me for this!”

As I walked up the stairs I decided I wouldn't be so near him; I feared for a moment that he may hurt me when he discovered how I had against my word tested his secret and thereby stripped him of his strength. I called back for a man who knew how to handle a razor to follow me.

While he slept ever soundly—too soundly for his own good—I had the man quickly and quietly put the razor to Samson's scalp and shave the hair from his head. The deed was soon done.

Putting the razor quite out of his reach and sight, I removed myself from the bed and, in some last desperate attempt for show, lest he had fooled me in an amazing fashion, I picked up the pitcher and a cup and stood by the door. I had also, in such a case, prepared some lame conversation of how I knew all along that he was lying to me and I in my silly, inquisitive mind had only wondered how he would look, that I sought not to test his strength—all this was already pushing the limit of my trustworthiness for he had indeed told me not to test this secret of his strength as I had the others. And if this was another of his lies, I knew not what I would do, for I had nearly exhausted my resources and my chance of not being found out until the task had been completed.

## BETRAYAL

I was not prepared in the least for the scene that was to unfold before my very eyes, and would not depart from me until my dying day.

“Samson!” I called out, almost hesitantly, “the Philistines be upon thee yet again!” and I prepared to laugh as I had the other times.

He jumped up groggily and raised his eyebrows. His face almost broke out into a smirk as he looked about, perhaps wondering what type of ropes I had tied him with this time, and then he put his hand to scratch his head. His face was one of utter shock and confusion, but it had not time to fully mature into whatever expression he would have conjectured for this horrid occasion.

Just as he stood up, holding himself the way he always did—confidently and assuredly, the men burst into the door and grabbed hold of him. He made the same moves he had always taught me, and said, “May God have mercy on me; I will go out as I have before!” His hand plowed into the neck of one of the men and sent him immediately to the floor. But the other three grabbed hold of Samson and he was not strong enough to push them aside. The rest of the men came tearing up the stairs, ready to help. Soon enough the one who had fallen was helped up and another man put his hands upon Samson. They put chains upon him. The four that came at first were enough.

And then he saw me standing by the door, horror on my face. As our eyes locked my heart froze and I dropped the clay pitcher. It crashed to the floor in a thousand pieces.

“Is this why you begged me for my secret? You waited for the day I could fully trust you so that you could repay me with betrayal? Did you also lie that you loved me?”

I opened my mouth, but no words would come out. Finally I stuttered, “I ... I did love you. But...”

"What did they pay you for this? Tell me it was not of your own doing, but that you were threatened," he said angrily.

"Take him away," I said coldly, once I had recovered from my shock. The shame I felt was beyond anything I had imagined. So was the anger when he spoke to me just then. I winced when I heard one of the men swing at him, hitting him with full force in his jaw, filling his mouth with blood. He struggled. Another shoved him from behind and he lunged forward a few steps, not falling for several men held him tightly. They could not believe that he was actually robbed of his strength, and they would not take any risks. But he was robbed of it indeed, and it had been my doing.

"Take him away, I said!" I repeated. They stopped beating him and started walking him the direction of the door.

As he walked by me, I lifted my face towards him. I thought he would be looking ahead, but no, his gaze was fixed on me, a look of utter disbelief and hurt in his expressive eyes. The look I returned was perfectly cold, though my heart burned within. His lustrous locks now sat unceremoniously on the pillows he had lain on, some descending to the floor having been severed from their once great and glorious master. Upon his head were uneven patches of hair that we had cut so quickly as if racing to get to this awful moment that now tightened about my neck and threatened to hang me. A small trickle of blood flowed from his mouth down his chin from the blow he had received earlier. But what I saw in his eyes would haunt me forever.

In a few brief moments he was on the doorstep. Then I heard the large door swing shut. Jeila had been standing by, watching this spectacle. She was familiar with the Philistine way. She seemed to

## BETRAYAL

understand what had happened, but her mind and heart would never comprehend the pain that it brought me. She had seen me betray others, but how this was different—to me at least. I had betrayed my heart and a messenger from God. Now who would rescue his people from the horrors—that I for only a second acknowledged—that our people rained down upon them?



Jeila stood at my door for several moments before I noticed her.

“What is it?”

“Shall I tend to your room?” she asked. I knew she was speaking of the shattered jar and the hair all over my bed.

“Not now,” I said, and shook my head, my eyes staring themselves into a stupor over one single bunch of hair that I had thrown a bit further than the others. She bobbed her head and left.

The sun was subtly announcing its coming presence; dawn’s light was beginning to overcome the dark of night.

The party was over. So was the life I had known for, it seemed, forever. The sad, sad life I had known before I had met Samson was so empty, and yet in fear and pride I had thrown the treasures I had found with him all away—and for what? Not even I could answer the simplest of these questions. The torment of my spirit had begun. It was God’s punishment for my wicked deed. I had known better and even my heart had cried out against me. But I had done it, and I would pay the price for as long as I lived—at least. The punishments had begun, and there was no escaping them.

I shut the door behind me and leaned my full

weight on it, my head upturned towards the ceiling. I waited and waited for the tears to come. But my heart was frozen. Fear engulfed me for a moment when I remembered Samson's God. *Will He strike me? Judge me?* I thought to myself.

I tried to cheer myself at the thought of the great sum I was to receive from Nor and the lords for the excellent work I had done in turning Samson over to them. I leaned against the door for I know not how long, save that my feet were growing stiff from being in the same position for so great a while, and my head faint for being upturned for just as long.

I remembered how infuriated I had felt when I heard of how Samson had slain a thousand of my people at once. But now where were those people? Who did I have?

*No one!* I cried bitterly. *No one! I have no one.* After a moment or two of unstifled sobbing, I strove to regain my composure. Why, I know not. I suppose because I always had. The tears that burned my eyes rolled down my cheeks and a glassy stare returned to my eyes. I was lost. What was I to do now? Betray yet others? Surely the lords would have me in their employment again. I had done such an excellent job, I thought to myself.

"No! No! No! No." I said aloud. "I will not go and work for those serpents," I said resolutely, and then the tears threatened to pour out my eyes again. "No, they are not the serpents," I said to myself, with the cheerful tone of a woman gone mad and trying to cope with her pain. "I am the serpent," I added matter-of-factly, "crushing souls beneath my dainty toes." I stepped on a shattered piece of the jar that I had dropped, twisting my sandal back and forth over it, crushing it to yet finer bits.

I walked over to the bed with that same glassy stare, as if something compelled me and I could

do nothing to stop it. I sat slowly down, my eyes still far away. Not even the feeling of the locks of hair on the pillow behind me, and all around me, broke my mindless gaze. I picked up a few strands of hair that lay within reach, and scooted my fingers over to them, my eyes still fixated on the horizon, as if I was waiting for it to come and awaken me from this nightmare.

I lay back and twirled his hair about my finger slowly, then more quickly. I picked up more hair and wrapped it about my other fingers. Tears streamed down my cheeks, yet still, still my gaze would not leave the horizon. The tip of the sun was beginning to rise. I knew that soon, the curtains still open, the blinding glare of the sunlight would force my eyes to shut.

I picked up another bunch of hair, and this time, my lips, my eyes and my cheeks yielded to the compelling plea of my heart to weep, weep, weep. To acknowledge I had done a cruel and devilish deed. To let the tears that came from my crushed heart somehow give me the strength to ask Samson's God for mercy. And perhaps, if my strength was bold enough, and my love fearless enough, to ask Him to deliver Samson that His people might be saved. I knew that Samson would never see me again, and would hate me the rest of his life even if he were delivered. But how could I live—I, a selfish, cruel woman, who had turned a poor and righteous people's only chance for deliverance, into the hands of evil.

My beauty crumpled into a mess of tears and creases of anguish. My cheeks were flushed, my eyes were red as the blood that flowed through my veins. I looked at the last bunch of hair that I had picked up, brought it to my trembling lips and kissed it.

"I did not know ... my life would be so empty ...

so empty without you, Samson, without ... yes, without ... without your God," I said in little bursts. I could no longer contain all the emotion that welled in my heart and seemed to make every powerful effort to burst straight out of my head in painful punishment for what I had done.

"But He will not hear me ... not now ... not ever." I took the hair that I had just kissed and wiped my tears with it. "Now I have no one. Dagon will not even hear me, if ever he did, for all my weakness of heart in ridding our country of its greatest foe."

"Dagon hears us all, and it is he who assisted you," came a smooth voice from one who had crept into the room quietly and was now kneeling beside me. It was Nor. I refused to look at him, but instead turned my face towards the horizon. What he said made me shudder. But I knew that Dagon had done nothing, and I dared to say it.

"Dagon is not a god! He is a piece of stone, damned to the earth and should never have been carved into such a fiercely ugly statue," I muttered. I hoped not only to defy our miserable god, but also to offend our national pride in such a finely sculpted icon of worship.

"You could be tried for high treason, Delilah, for speaking against the chief god that we worship," came Nor's voice as he stood up again. "But you have served us well and so I will overlook it."

I always hated the reference to my servitude. It was a cruelly true representation of reality.

"Besides, I have taken quite a liking to you. You are so clever, have such fervor. Only, until now I did not think you were capable of tears," he said.

I still looked away. I could feel the obvious contempt in his voice for the way I lay among the hair of that one I had betrayed, a clay jar broken a few feet away.

“Yet I have come to bring you glad tidings,” he said, standing up. My eyes fell upon the small chest beside him. “Five handsome sacks, each holding 1100 pieces of silver from the lords! Better than we have ever paid anyone.” He cleared his throat, as if that would encourage me to appreciate him and his cohorts.

I refused to move from my position.

“Very well, then,” he said at last, the smooth tone of his voice all but gone. A few more moments of silence, then he turned to leave. “I wish I could be here to see you dance with the joy of a damsel preparing herself for her betrothal as you open the satchels and find your one true love,” he said as he walked out.

I said nothing. I lay there, the sun beginning to send a beam directly into my face, but having no desire to move. I closed my eyes and fell into a deep sleep.

I awoke a few hours later, the sun very high and very hot. My face was a rosy pink, and would have gone crimson, had I stayed there. Yet somehow my face felt strangely cool. I opened my eyes to see Jeila’s face a few inches away. She had been wiping my face and chest with a cool cloth, and had stopped when she saw me stirring.

“Jeila?” I was so disoriented from having slept so deeply for so long. She just smiled. She had cleaned as much of the hair from me as she could, and had swept the floor of the shattered pieces of the clay jar.

“I am sorry. I could not leave you like this,” she said meekly.

I looked at her with as much kindness as I probably ever had, though it would scarcely seem as such to someone who did know me as well as she did. I had never been in such an obviously vulnerable state, at least that Jeila had seen. Yet

she took it all quite graciously, as a well-taught servant would.

“Shall I help you bathe and change your garments?”

Somehow the kindness in her voice soothed me—kindness that had always been there, but was a small thing that gave great comfort, like the little things in childhood one gets attached to, the familiar things that bring us a little more peace in the time of most terrible heartache. Unlike my usual self, I nodded quietly and let her help me get up. Just as I would have with my mother—if I ever had known my mother.

A few hours later, I had bathed and changed my garments, but my preoccupation with the guilt that surrounded me was still very obvious. I sat on that garden balcony, not in my usual queenly fashion, but hugging one of the cushions in a despondent fashion. My mind was so far away that I did not even notice the footsteps that had come to join me on the balcony. When at last I noticed the presence, I started up very quickly. I could not have any more of my acquaintances seeing me so beside myself with grief over what to them was something so commonplace to me.

“Lie back down, Delilah,” came that lazy voice of Girad’s. He made imaginative gestures of pushing me back down onto the couch. I obeyed and relaxed once again on the couch.

I sighed. “It’s only you.”

He grinned. “Only me? Only the friend who has stood beside you always? Only the one who has become your greatest confidante? Only?”

I rolled my eyes, hoping they wouldn’t fill with tears at any movement. “What is it you want?”

“Is that the prize you received for betraying him?” Girad asked, cocking his head in the direction of my room. He had obviously seen the

sacks of silver on his way. "Glorious—truly glorious!" he muttered under his breath.

"What is it you want?" I asked again.

"I saw the man."

"What man?" I asked, pretending not to know what he was talking about, but knowing somehow that he was speaking of my Samson.

"What man?' she says," he said as he seated himself on the chair beside me and reclined in an altogether relaxed Girad fashion.

"Samson!"

"Oh please, I don't want to hear about Samson."

"Oh, but you do. I can see the morbid curiosity lingering in those sharp, devilish green eyes of yours," he taunted.

*Devilish indeed. That's what I am, a devil—a devil who has grown a conscience!* I thought to myself. Somehow Girad's presence distracted me from my grief and I began to return to my normal self—somewhat. He was innocent enough, but somehow he did not seem to grasp how deeply I had become attached to Samson's presence, and how I had only begun to realize that now ... now he was gone. So in his seeming ignorance I was forced to play the part I had played for so long. In truth, we were both humoring each other—he knowing only one way to distract me from my gloom, and me being too cowardly to tell him the truth and seek his comfort.

"Whether this morbid curiosity of mine exists or not, I can see that you want to tell me, so go on, I'll listen."

"Clever! You are always very clever," he responded quickly, knowing that I would not likely admit that I was curious to know what had become of him. "Very well then, we shall humor each other." He hesitated for a moment before he began the story and then turned to me: "Pray, if you wish not to hear this, I can very well tell some other

soul. If ... if it would bring you sorrow," he said, with, what I thought for a moment to be a glimmer of empathy.

I raised my eyebrows nonchalantly. "Tell me all of it, Girad."

"Samson was led down the streets of Gaza."

"What were you doing in Gaza?"

Girad looked at me as if to ask whether I wanted to know what he was doing in Gaza or about Samson. I nodded and he continued.

"I was merely walking the streets. I did not even know that he had been captured. Then I saw him. I did not immediately recognize him. Of course ... er, you know, he was bald, without hair."

"I know!"

"The crowds were gathered about as our soldiers marched him down. 'Behold, the deliverer of the people of Israel has been given into our hands by the mercy of Dagon!' someone shouted, and everyone cheered in a most Philistine fashion, for we are a jubilant people, are we not, my love?" I always hated it when Girad would refer to me as his love, and I supposed that he had said it purposely to stir up my spirit, but I cared not at this time. I wanted to hear what had become of Samson.

"Someone beside me shouted, 'He shall now pay for the sons of our wombs whom he has slain, and whose blood he has shed.' And everyone roared and stomped their feet. Truly much too passionate for one such as I, though I admit I was surprised to hear recently that he had truly killed so many. Somehow I had never known what a great enemy he has been to our people, but yet the peasants and every person nearly who walked the street, they knew." Girad looked to the side for a moment, "Perhaps I have been too ... too..."

"Too drunk?" I finished the sentence for him.



He laughed incredulously. "That was not what I meant to say, and you have given me no credit for my soberness of late. I have done well in the spice trade, my cousin tells me. And I have not even asked you for drink."

"The latter is true—I know not about the first."

"What? That I have done well with the spice trade. How would you know? You have not even... Perhaps I have not bothered myself much with our people's conquests and battles against other peoples, much less one single man who seemed to be..."

"Is there more to the story, my friend?"

He looked at me somewhat disapprovingly. I knew he merely jested with me. I tapped his knee with the tip of one foot.

"The story!" I whispered and smiled as charmingly as I could under the circumstances.

Surprisingly enough, he smiled back.

"You feel love for me at last!" I teased. I was trying so desperately to distract myself from the horrid grief I had known only several hours earlier. I knew that so long as I did not think of it, the burden of sorrow would lighten. What a fool I was; it would return no less heavy and I would be less able to escape from it than ever.

He smiled sheepishly for a moment, then that smirk reappeared on his face. I knew not for a moment whether he jested or not. But what of it? Contrary to my desire to forget Samson and what I had done, I had an insatiable curiosity to hear what had become of him. Perhaps his God had had mercy on him and he had fled! I had not thought of that until just then. Rather than wait to the end of the story I asked,

"Girad, then what? Did he flee? Did his God grant him power to break his bands and flee them all?" I made sure to have somewhat of a mocking

countenance rather than a curious one, so that my heart would not be betrayed.

Girad laughed long and heartily. I giggled, though deep down inside I prepared to return myself to the fact that all had not gone so magically.

“No, love, he did nothing of the sort! Nor will he—not without any help at least, even if he did manage to break free.”

“Why would that be?” I asked, recovering from my pretentious giggle.

“The morbid beasts gouged his eyes out, that’s why!”

I made the most disgusted face I could in an attempt to stifle the tear that was surfacing at this heartbreaking news. “They put his eyes out?” I repeated with a further disgusted look.

“Beasts, I tell you. I suppose they wanted to be sure he had no chance of breaking free. I heard that once he feigned himself beaten, and was taken to the garrison of Ashdod. Then, once there, he killed a host of men before he fled.”

“When did you hear this?” I managed to say as calmly as possible though I wanted to scream. They had not mentioned they would subject him to such torture! But how could I, a deceiver of all, ever be so naïve to imagine that others could not also be deceiving just the same. His eyes! The façade that I had managed for just a few minutes with Girad, but what seemed forever to me, quickly started to tremble. It was all I could do not to let it crumble right there and then.

“Only a day ago or so. A soldier who married one of my cousins was telling me. He was all too glad he was not posted in Ashdod.”

“I can see why!” I forced a reply while struggling to swallow all this new information. I had heard of some of the stories, but not this one, and every new tale rubbed vigorously against my tender,

wounded heart—wounded by my own hand, indeed, but nevertheless wounded.

“Well, I suppose that was beastly enough of him. But ... but they shouldn’t have put his eyes out,” I muttered.

“What was that?”

I looked up at him as if I had said nothing.

“I suppose you wanted one last look into those charming eyes.”

“The last look was horrid enough, and I think I couldn’t bear to see them again.” I crinkled my nose and made a mock sorrowful face. It showed only the most minute portion of the horror I felt—with myself, and with the beasts. Samson was only defending his people. It was *our* people who ravaged their lands, stealing from his people and setting fire to their fields and villages. Samson had come to deliver, not to initiate attacks of cruelty merely to show his or even his God’s might. Even I knew that.

I closed my eyes for a moment and remembered when he had looked into my eyes—the look was so deep, so searching, so piercing, and yet so betrayed. It was as if I had watched his gentle love be beaten and crushed at my command. It was a painful sight. And though I deserved the greater punishment for what I had done, he had already suffered the more, being unable now to help his people, knowing that his love had betrayed him. And now even his sight had been taken from him.

“Delilah? Are you tired? It was a long night last night, wasn’t it?”

I opened my eyes immediately, and then forced a yawn which seemed to fit appropriately. “Ah yes, but now, go on, tell me the rest of the story.”

“Oh, I have not that much to tell. He was taken to Gaza, I told you, did I not?”

“You did. And ... and that his eyes were put out.” I winced as I said it, but gave the greatest effort in

pretending to not be too deeply distraught over it.

“My cousin’s husband...”

“The soldier.”

“Yes, he was there on guard duty. He allowed me in that I could at least see Samson from afar off. I did not want to speak to him or be anywhere near him, for I never disliked him entirely, and found him pleasant company. But I did not want him knowing I was around on such an occasion. I would not know what to say or what to do.”

“So what did they do to him?”

“They put fetters of brass on him and put him to work grinding wheat. He is chained to the great large millstone.”

“He walks blindly in circles, grinding wheat,” I repeated. Girad looked at me strangely. Perhaps he wondered why I was so curious as to the details. I had loved Samson for so long—it seemed to me—that even after my tragic betrayal of him, I was still intensely curious as to every detail and activity pertaining to him.

We sat there silent for a few moments. I was hoping every second that Girad would continue conversing in his jovial manner; it was in this silence that I again felt myself sinking to the very depths of sorrow, weighed down by great guilt. Perhaps in the deeper portions of my mind and heart I feared Samson’s God. Perhaps Girad’s mind was on other things, or perhaps he waited for me to speak, having run out of things to talk about himself.

“So why else have you come?” I asked, looking straight into his eyes, hoping that it would draw some pleasant conversation out of him. But he had resumed his lazy look and merely cocked one eyebrow in immediate response to my question.

“Must a friend have a reason to visit another friend?” he asked.

Sensitive as I was I was almost offended, but his large grin knew just when to reveal itself and put me at ease.

Then he sat forward and leaned his elbows on his knees. "I only came to visit you, knowing how awful a night you must have had."

I lifted my eyebrows questioningly, my eyes seeking for an explanation. Had he truly a greater insight as to how horrid it had been, or was he merely generalizing?

Knowing me too well, he knew he must explain. "These activities of yours with the men must be most extenuating for you."

"What activities? The pleasurable ones?" I caught myself saying with an impish grin. I knew that something inside me was trying frantically to do anything to distract me from what was—and could yet be—an all-encompassing sorrow.

"No, no. The ending, the betrayal," he said casually. It was not the first time I had done such a thing, and he was all too familiar with this aspect of my life.

By now I hated that word—betrayal. It had taken on an all-new and frightful meaning, and I shuddered to hear it.

I said nothing. I could say nothing, nor did I want to say anything. I would rather have just ignored it if I could, and pretended it was all a nightmare. But I knew that I couldn't. My only hope, I thought, was to forever run from the acknowledgement of what I had done.

"Farewell, my strong woman; you have conquered even the mighty Samson," Girad said somewhat significantly as he got up. But I didn't understand.

"What do you mean?"

"Once you spoke to me of how Samson's strength of character terrified you; you had not

seen such in the men you dealt with, I suppose. I told you that the only way to become stronger than he would be to find his weakness and prey upon it. Shall I congratulate you?" He spoke with what I thought was a note of sarcasm. Somehow I felt that I perhaps had disgusted even Girad. How I could have done such a thing to a man who appeared to be so shallow, I did not know. But though it was not a great deal to him, I knew he did not consider this as great a victory for me—only a victory for our people.

I could not think of anything appropriate to say. My lips were sealed, and my mind was frozen.

"I shall see you on the morrow perhaps. Now that you have more time, maybe you would like to help me with the spice trade that was initially both our investment? It will mean travel—if you wish ... perhaps to Egypt?"

For a moment my mind drifted into a future of dazzling wealth, riches, glamour and glory, hoping it would revitalize my spirit. Yet it was all too much like my past. But what else did I have? I was not one to be content sitting around moaning over the tragedy. However, within the depths of my heart—in a part of me which I was trying to push to the deepest crevasses of my soul for fear that I could not cope otherwise—I knew that since I had known Samson and to a degree, his God, I could not feel happiness of that magnitude with anything or anyone else. Now that the treasures of Samson's love and his God I had had beside me were gone, I suddenly realized how much it had all meant to me. But now, now, no more of that. I had to run away from it all.

"Yes, Girad! You and I, we should travel together."

"Er, but one of us should stay to manage the business on this side."

“Oh, the business will be all right. You have competent servants handling the details, do you not?”

“Uh, of course.”

I leaned over towards him and touched his knee gently. “Girad, I have no other man in my life just now; we can be together. We have always been friends, yet there have been other people. Now is our chance!”

Girad looked at me strangely. For a moment I wondered if he had peered into the inner chambers of my soul and seen how I was desperately looking for a distraction, a way to forget all that had occurred here, to dazzle myself with excitement and change so that I would have not a moment to think of anything else, especially of Samson who at this moment walked blindly about in circles, grinding wheat.

Whether Girad knew my motives or not, I would never know. He seemed happy for some womanly company to help him enjoy his wealthy life all the more. Perhaps, I hoped, he would find new excitement in expending energies doting on me, giving me gifts. And I would try to please him in return. Nothing was too high a price to pay on my part if it would accomplish the purpose of diverting my attention. Girad did not even let the question in his eyes express itself through his lips.

“Very well then. I shall arrange the details. We do not have long. I was planning to travel to the East in four days. I hear there are excellent markets there.”

“I shall be ready in no time, Girad!” I said with excitement, jumping up and kissing him on the cheek. “You make me ever happy, my friend!”

He grinned, just as he always did, and shook his head. “Delilah, Delilah,” he said, before shaking his head again and chuckling. I skipped

## BETRAYAL

back into the house, turning back once or twice and waving. It was all a pretense, but it dulled the pain I felt. Once I was out of his sight my droopy, dispirited body walked faintly back to my room.



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Samson's cry of pain rang through the dark halls of Gaza's main prison. Two of the soldiers were beating him.

"You Israelite dog! What kind of a God would make your strength dependent on such a flimsy secret—your straw-like hair?" one mocked.

Samson grunted and began to get up, albeit with great difficulty, for he no longer could see. Not only that, but the flesh where his eyes had been had barely healed, and was extremely painful whenever his head was touched. The slightest contact would bring on the most intense pain. But he was not one to take such taunting of Jehovah meekly. Just as he managed to get up on all fours, the other of the two Philistine guards kicked him in the side. Samson slid a few feet across the filthy ground, through the grime and hay strewn about on the floor, right to the feet of the other Philistine guard.

"You could make us quite a plaything, my boy!" The guard said, kicking Samson back to the guard who had kicked him in the first place.

Samson managed a feeble response. "I betrayed my God's trust in me. He never failed me; I failed Him."

"Oh, you failed Him, no doubt! But I am sure that if your God boasts half the power you Israelites say He does, you wouldn't be blind and rotting here

in the very captivity of your people's enemies!"

"It is a punishment for my sins. I was given much and so..."

"Yes, yes, we'll help your God punish you for your sins. Your God is nothing more than a name!" The outburst was followed by a hideous laugh. "At least our god has a statue. At least we have an idea of what he looks like, ha!"

The other guard snickered in agreement.

Samson felt the anger welling up within him. His heart burned within him, and if he had had his eyes, they would have flashed the greatest anger yet. Those senseless soldiers had mocked the living God!

With great effort and speed for someone who had had their eyes put out several days before, and just been beaten with sticks like a dog, Samson leapt to his feet and charged towards the figure nearest him, whose position Samson could only tell by the heavy breathing and the foregoing slew of blasphemies that had come from his mouth.

For a moment the men were stunned and wondered if Samson's power had been returned. Samson lunged forward, just barely managing to grab the one guard's neck. "No one speaks evil of the living God without receiving due punishment!"

The guard began gasping for air, having been taken quite off guard by the rage with which Samson had propelled himself to his feet. The other guard, not sure if he was watching Samson merely perform this in a fit of anger under his own power, or whether his supernatural strength had indeed returned, stood motionless at the other side of the room.

"Garmel!" the one guard gasped to the other. "Help me!" He choked and gasped. His color turned from bright red to crimson, which was slowly being replaced with that pale bluish color of one who has been deprived too long of air. His eyes began to roll

back into his head and he could do nothing, it seemed—not for lack of strength, but rather because of the gripping fear that came with remembrance of Samson's former feats against the Philistines.

Garmel stood there still motionless, till something clicked within him and he went rushing towards Samson and broke the other guard free from Samson's grip. It was not too difficult, but it was almost too late. The other guard slumped to the floor, unconscious.

Garmel looked at Samson with great fury. He charged at him like a madman, with every intent of giving him the same treatment Samson had just given his friend, only he hoped he would kill Samson. Samson could not do anything more to defend himself than a regular man whose fit of rage had now somewhat passed and who was being overcome by tremendous fatigue.

"You there!" came a voice from without. "Stop that! You remember the instructions! We are not meant to kill him!—Or you'll meet the same fate, in the same way!" The warden shouted the last sentence even louder for emphasis.

Garmel finally loosed his grasp on Samson's neck, and looked at him with all the hate he had within him.

The warden opened Samson's cell and saw the other guard.

"Hmmm. Pick your friend up and take him to a physician. No, first chain Samson back to the grindstone. Why did you loose him anyway? He is not meant to be loosed!"

"To teach him a lesson."

"Seems like he taught you one for disobeying orders—or that friend of yours at least. Now do it!"

Garmel reluctantly obeyed, and followed the warden's instructions, trying to cause Samson as much pain and discomfort as he chained him back

up and pushed him in the direction he was meant to be grinding.

“That’s enough!” the warden said, not having great sympathy at all for Samson, but merely trying to keep this soldier in line. “The longer your friend sits here, the longer it will take him to recover—*if* he recovers!” That comment brought another surge of rage to Garmel, who turned back towards Samson. Samson tensed, sensing what was happening and hearing Garmel’s footsteps hurriedly coming his direction.

“I said enough, or you’ll have a few more guards to contend with! Your friend!” the warden shouted and nodded in the direction of the guard still slumped over in the corner.

Garmel went over and picked up his helpless, unconscious friend, with one last look of fury towards Samson.

“Don’t waste your expressions; the man can’t see you, remember?”

Garmel walked out the prison cell, and at the warden’s gruff command, Samson began shuffling in the direction he was meant to go ... in endless circles.

“Oh God! Forgive me for my folly, for relinquishing my responsibility in a moment of weakness! All that You have allowed to happen to me, I deserve—and more. Only help me not die in this place. And if there is yet some service I am to perform for my people—Your people—have mercy and let me not fail You or them again.”



“Delilah?” Girad walked slowly through the halls of my home. At last he bumped into Jeila. “Ah! Where is your mistress?”

“She left, but not for long. I am not certain where she has gone to.”

“Ah, but I think that you have an idea.”

Jeila lowered her eyes.

"Tell me now, fair Jeila," Girad cooed somewhat jocularly, but not cruelly.

Jeila feigned a face of disgust, knowing he only meant to pry the idea out of her mind.

"Very well then. There is a place she likes to go, a stream not far from here." That was all Jeila was willing to tell. Girad would have to find his way, something he was not entirely opposed to doing, the casual wanderer that he was when he did not have anything pressing to do—which was much of the time.

Indeed, I stood by the stream, and had for about an hour by the time Girad set off on his search for me. When I had climbed out of bed earlier with the first morning light, depressed and despairing still, I was furious to trip over the satchels of money Nor had left beside my bed. I burst into tears, my emotional guard torn down by the events of that fateful night seven days before and the torment since. I stopped sobbing and wiped the tears from my eyes as I picked up one of two sacks of silver that I had dragged all the way out there.

Then some of Samson's last words echoed in my mind. *Tell me, what did they pay you?*

"Nothing will ever be able to repay what Samson's presence gave me!" I had said quietly, clenching my teeth in anger as I spoke. Suddenly a thought danced through my mind. I threw on the nearest garment and shawl, and without summoning Jeila to dress me and adorn me, I ran out of the house with two of the bags of money in my hand. It was all I could carry, and hardly that. I moved past Jeila as fast as I could, but did not say a word. I knew that if I did, my eyes would start burning with tears, and I could not have her see me like that again. It was a poor concealment of my state, yet somehow it helped me not have to face the change that had come

over me inside—a change that I did everything within my power to suppress.

I ran without stopping, through the fields and faint remnants of a path that I used to walk down all too often, the path that led me to the only place I felt free to be myself—just me and nature, enjoying each other's accepting presence. At last the stream was in sight. I ran to the edge of it and fumbled with the first sack, unwittingly knotting its strings, and then kicking it, moving on to the second sack. The second sack opened easily, and I threw the silver into the stream.

When I had emptied that bag, I reached down by my feet for the bag whose strings were knotted. Then something caught my eye. It was a piece of the veil that Samson had torn off me long ago, hanging on the branch. It was only a shred, but then all the memories that I had fought so hard came back, flooding my mind and my eyes. I picked up the small sack, bit and tore the leather strings to get them loose, and then dumped them also into the river. Some of the coins fell at my feet.

I walked over and pulled the shred of material off of the tree. It was entwined around a small twig on a branch—no wonder it was able to stay. Still, I wondered if God had placed it there—as a punishment, or a summons to judgment ... and perhaps, I hoped, mercy. But I did not know Him. I had mocked Him. And now I had betrayed His messenger, the deliverer He had sent for His people.

I wiped my eyes with the little piece of material that seemed to contain within itself the magic of those moments long ago—moments that I had taken for granted, moments that I had thrown away, for what? I could not remember. I no longer knew, and this brought me no comfort. I could not even remember a wicked, selfish reason why I had done this thing, why I had not been brave and

selfless and even given my life that Samson's people might be saved. My miserable life would have been better used that way.

When I passed the veil over my eyes, wiping the tears, I remembered my Samson, how he no longer had eyes. Not only had I robbed his people of their deliverer, and him of his dignity, but I also had robbed him of his eyesight. What a cruel, cruel serpent-like beast I was, I kept telling myself.

A ray of sunshine peered momentarily from behind the clouds that cast a dull spell over the day, just like the clouds that now permeated every part of my life. It glistened on the silver at my feet, and I kicked yet another coin into the river. Then I looked at the awful existence that was reflected in the river.

*Perhaps ... perhaps I could lose myself in the river, with the coins,* I thought, as a strange trance began to come over me. I shuffled toe by toe closer to the stream, which was barely a foot away. Did I have the courage?

Just then I saw Girad sauntering up in the distance, and then, as he neared me, walking more briskly. I kept my eyes on the silver at my feet, kicking yet another one into the stream. As Girad approached, I set my eyes on the horizon, hoping that if I focused on one thing the tears would be hypnotized into staying within my heart.

"Delilah! We are meant to leave today."

I stood there, silent, afraid to breathe a word lest it get caught in my throat. He moved closer. Slowly, gingerly, he put his arms around me.

"I am so sorry," he said with an understanding that seemed so unlike Girad. Of a truth, there were only short glimpses into that side of his personality—glimpses so short that I always wondered if it was not a figment of my imagination. This one was the longest yet.

“Do not judge yourself so harshly, Delilah.”

Only a few words. But the touch, the acceptance of another human being—who knew me as I was, and somehow did not judge me as harshly as I had judged myself, brought a measure of relief to my soul. It brought me from the edge that I meant to throw myself off of, in a desperate attempt to escape what lay just a few steps behind me. It brought me from entertaining the thought of plunging myself into the stream, leaving myself to the same fate as the silver. But it only brought me that far, not a step further towards peace than merely being able to exist with myself.

After several moments I leaned back on Girad’s chest. He did not seem entirely comfortable with my state. Who would?

“Shall I go alone?” he said at last. I pondered the thought. I felt in no condition to travel, yet what else would I do here? Find the courage another day to plunge myself beneath the shallow depths of the stream in a cowardly effort to escape the reality of what I had done? Perhaps that would have been a better thing.

It was no longer a secret to me, nor even to Girad: Samson had carved within my heart a greater place for himself than I had ever imagined. And it was this place now that seemed strangely empty. I struggled to fill it—with anything. More conquests of men? Perhaps Ekkor would have work for me. The thought in itself repulsed me, but if it would at least give me something new to have to struggle with besides my memories of Samson, I was only too agreeable with the idea. More wealth? I did not know.

Selfishly I wanted to find something to distract myself, instead of bringing myself before the mercy of the God I did not know myself but only through Samson. I did not have the courage to go before



Samson, no matter what the cost, and beg his forgiveness, and the mercy of His God. It would not be to make excuses, for there were none. Not to explain how I was threatened by the Philistine lords. Not to justify, but only to repent. But I could not do it. I preferred to struggle with this always, in the hope of distracting myself and healing my shattered heart with the things that had brought me such pleasure and fed my ambition and lust for power and wealth.

“I shall go with you,” I sighed, and turned to Girad, putting my hand to his cheek. He said nothing then, nor did he say anything as we walked to the house. Our positions had surely been reversed. Now I was the drunkard and he was the promising youth. I was drunk with sorrow, and ready to pay any price to regain my peace and lose sight of reality.

That evening we left to travel during the cool of the night.



During the day Samson ground wheat. In their folly, my country’s fine lords had given him the work of a mule, which only served to strengthen him. At night he slept on a filthy floor chained to the wall, with as much hay as he could manage to kick to his “bed” as the guard shuffling him over would allow. Samson said not a word, no, not aloud. But from within his heart flowed prayer after prayer of repentance. And in his mind the memories were relived over and over.

*My God, how I wist not that Your Spirit would truly depart from me! I thought not that I would be betrayed, so foolishly I thought it. But within the deepest parts of my heart I must not have believed You as surely as You lived within me. Are You now departed? I have sinned and I have repented, but I no longer seek forgiveness—that is a gift too great, a gift I am too*

*undeserving of. Only I seek that I might redeem myself of a portion of all that I threw away. Oh God, help me in some way yet to deliver Thy people!*

He strained to lift his chained arms to his head, and awkwardly, ever so awkwardly, he felt patches of hair on his head. Hardly had it grown, but grown it had. *Will the spirit of Thy strength return to me with the length of my hair? I cannot know, nor will I ever take the gift for granted again, if I die not in here, but live to see the day of redemption.*

“You shall see it,” came the response within his mind and heart—perhaps even in his ears, though Samson knew not how truly God spoke that one night.



The way to Egypt was long and far, and travel was sorely unlike the luxurious kind of living I was used to. The inconveniences of traveling through the Desert of Shur were more than enough to unravel my spirit, yet they still served to distract me—though not as enjoyably as I had hoped.

“Behold! The land of Egypt across the river!” one of the guides called out. We had reached the river of Egypt. Some of our caravan cheered. I offered a grunt. Girad looked at me out of the corner of his eye, perhaps wondering to himself whether it was such a noble idea to try to indulge me in a variety of experiences. Living in tents along the way—as wealthy and comfortable as the best of tents could be—and traveling on camels was not my idea of variety. Nevertheless I looked forward to more partying, hoping it would bring the relief I needed.

Girad seemed to sense my thoughts that moment. “Delilah, we shall have more partying once we arrive and find the spices. This is after all a merchant endeavor, and we should not refrain from indulging ourselves to celebrate our successes. We will all deserve the reward.”

Still, all I could offer was a nod and a feeble smile for Girad, who offered one himself, somewhat amused with my smitten spirit, albeit not entirely pitiless.

"Egypt was at one time a great empire. You can tell its majesty by the pyramids that lie in the distance. Imagine the grandeur of such enormous pyramids in the midst of vast expanse of sand. And the great sphinx!" the guide explained.

"You have never been to Egypt, have you?" the guide asked me.

I shook my head.

"I think a woman of your kind will like it."

I smiled as faintly as I could, and the guide understood that I was in no position to hold even a polite conversation. *What does he mean, "a woman of my kind,"* I thought to myself, disgusted that even a stranger could class me from my very conduct and comportment. *I suppose that is the principal way people are classed anyway,* I mused.

It was to be our last night camping in the desert. I had my own tent, complete with plush rugs, a bed and cushions. No wonder we had to take a caravan for these things! Even a few camels came who were not thus laden with things that they might take the great amounts of merchandise we were to bring back, which I was sure was not only spices.

I lay in my bed, the cold desert wind howling outside. So far away from my home, yet the memories of my familiar surroundings and Samson were still as close as ever. Each night Girad had some of the menservants build a huge fire. We ate and some of the men and accompanying women-servants danced and sang and told stories while Girad and I, and whoever was not part of the entertainment at that moment, sat and watched. Even while we traveled in the sandy

region I took great care to adorn myself as beautifully as I could.

*How kind it was of Girad to try and make this journey as pleasant as he could*, I thought just then. *Perhaps he would marry me*, I thought suddenly. Then I could forever leave the life that seemed to have been given me by lot. Who had cast the lots on my life? If I would have known, I would have stopped at nothing to confront them and know why, oh why, I had been dealt such a poor lot in life. Strange I would think that; before I had met Samson I thought only on the fact that the gods had blessed me with beauty, wealth and sharp wits. But now it meant nothing. I only wanted to somehow distract myself if I could, and if I could not, repay by forever leaving that life and becoming a servant, even to someone like Girad.

Just then the outer curtains of my tent opened. For a moment I was affrighted, but quickly relaxed. I figured that whatever happened to me, if it was evil it would be all that I deserved, and I could then perhaps feel forgiven. Had I only known the power and nature of God's forgiveness! He would forgive if I would have but humbly come to Him and *sought* it. Even at this moment His heart broke for my waywardness, for my refusal to bow low before Him and beg mercy for my sin. It was a sin whose depths I had not even fathomed until now, as I fell deeper and deeper into the bottomless pit of condemnation, remorse and contempt for myself. This was my punishment.

Evil as I had been, had I merely turned and pleaded, on bended knee with bowed head, my heart in my hands outstretched to Him, He would have accepted me. I still would have had to pay some price, but with the knowledge and comfort that He had forgiven me. Yet strangely enough, as torn as I was by what I had done, I could not bring myself

to face my evil and ask the one God—who I had hardly known, but whose messenger I had loved and betrayed—for forgiveness.

Through the faint moonlight, a shadow neared the curtain that surrounded my bed. As the figure approached, I saw it was Girad.

“Oh, Girad! I feared for a moment that I was in danger. Why do you come here at this time of night?”

“I could not sleep all this while.”

“Nor could I,” I mumbled.

“There is something I must tell you, Delilah, and I would rather tell it you in the quiet of the night when the darkness veils our faces from one another.”

I grew curious. Girad was rarely this serious.

“What is it?” I asked, and then laughed. “I hope it is that you love me, Girad, for you have been such a friend and I...” I had, in my struggle to cope, decided that my only escape would be with Girad.

“I had not come to tell you that,” he began slowly, and my heart sank somewhat. Had not anyone I had befriended loved me, save Samson? I felt rejected for a moment.

Then he continued. “Though my heart would tell you that if it were allowed to speak,” he said.

“Then what stops us?” I demanded.

“Sssshhhh! You mustn’t wake the others or alarm them.” He chuckled at my lack of restraint. “Of a truth, I do love you, Delilah. Yet you know that within our custom we might not marry whomever we choose. You have been a spoiled child, spared much...”—knowing I would remonstrate, he quickly added, “...but all that you have been spared has been repaid by the harshness of living the kind of life you have led, I understand. If you truly wish to leave your old life, like you say, and this is not only an outburst of emotion and rebellion against that which you think

condemns you, then there are rules you shall have to conform to that most have to live by all of their lives. I, too, have lived a foolish and frivolous life in these, my youthful years, but now my father demands that I do as the customs of our land call us to. And this custom stands before you as well."

"And what is this custom that you speak of?" I asked.

"If you will, there is a wealthy man, a friend of my father's, who might take your hand in marriage. He is looking for a beautiful young woman, and my father asked me about you."

"What?!" I cried.

Girad put a gentle hand to my lips. Suddenly Girad was no longer an escape route—I realized he was my first choice, aside from Samson. I knew that if I were with any other man, I would only dwell in suffering always. I was used to living a carefree life, not dictated by any. If I were to put myself under the subjection of a man, it had to be Girad.

"You cannot live like this forever—you will be slave to someone. Either to the Philistine lords or to another man. Which will you choose?"

"Why can I not marry you?"

"You know that it is not how it works."

"Then how does it work? I must have you!" I spoke in a loud, desperate whisper.

Girad sighed. "All your life you have known no bounds. Nor have I. But we will learn."

"I cannot do this. Why, why cannot I have you?"

It was many moments of silence before Girad spoke. I could not see his face, but I knew that during the moments of silence his head was lowered and he wished I had not made it so difficult.

"I have been promised to another."

"Was this always meant to be?"

“I know not, but perhaps if you had made known your desire for me earlier, my father may have conceded. Now it is all arranged. But, do not lie to yourself or to me. I know that you only want me because you have lost Samson. Harsh a truth as it is, I know it and I will not allow myself to be deceived.” I marveled at his understanding of my thoughts and heart, even though I hated the fact that he knew me too well.

“Ponder the offer, Delilah. It is all that I can do for you. But I shall care for you from a distance, for we have been good friends all these years.”

I reached out for his hand; he kissed it and stood up. I remembered how we had met in the fields when he was a boy. How things had changed! How in our innocence we had never conceived of the twisted paths our lives would take!

“Girad! You speak the very depths of my heart, things I had not even known myself. I will not deny that I love Samson still, and that day and night my heart suffers greatly for what I have done! It is so strange that ... that I had done this very thing before, and while it was a wicked mistreatment of the hearts that had placed themselves beside mine, this betrayal of Samson was the greatest evil. He was the deliverer of his people! His God had sent him! I have myself plucked God’s messenger from his place and put him within a prison, leaving him without all hope of freeing his people ... and ... and all hope of ever setting his eyes upon anything again!”

“If his God is nearly as powerful and great a God as Samson did proclaim Him to be, you will not have entirely crushed His efforts. And if He is not...” Girad did not have an ending, though somehow I took comfort that perhaps there was still more to come, that it was not the last I would have heard of Samson and his exploits.

Girad loosened his grasp of my hand; I tightened mine. "Please don't leave me, Girad! I have wronged you, I have wronged many, I have betrayed a man who gave unto my bosom the most sacred secret, which I then defiled by giving into the hands of his enemies..."

"...who are your own people."

I stopped for a moment. It all seemed so strange again, so confusing. I reflected a moment again on Girad's offer.

"I thank you, my friend."

"I make no promises. I only know that it is the best I can do—and as my friend, you deserve my best." Those words of loyalty and friendship from one who was but a friend to me, not even a lover as I was to Samson, cut me to the depths of my heart and soul.

"But I shall do it nonetheless, out of gratitude."

"You take my offer?"

"You seem surprised."

"Indeed I am."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I have never known you to place yourself beneath another—which is what you will be doing. Be not deceived. You seem to prefer, my dear friend, to be deceived into thinking that you have all the power, while it is hardly so. You even struggled with the very thought of that with your beloved Samson, whom you proclaim to love."

"I shall do it for you, Girad."

Girad chuckled in his own good-natured way. "Do not do it for me, Delilah! Do what seems right to your own heart. I must find my own path; I cannot bear the burdens of us both."

"Is this man young and strong?"

"I'm afraid he is not. He is old, but wealthy."

"How old?"

"Sixty-five years."



"Silly customs. A woman of six and twenty years old, spending the rest of her days with a man nearly forty years older," I mused, and then sighed. "When must all this happen?"

"Not too soon, but some time after we return my father will begin to ask me. Believe me, I am in no hurry, as you also are not. I mean to enjoy each moment of freedom I have."

"Enjoy it with me ... please?" I whispered.

First Girad laughed aloud. "Delilah begs?" He laughed again before lowering his voice to a whisper. "Very well. Somehow I did think that this was the purpose of your coming along," he said with amusement, scratching his head as if I finally understood the plans he seemed perfectly content on fulfilling with or without me, whether or not I ever understood enough to comply.

"Stay with me, Girad!" I begged.

"My love, I must go to my own tent and sleep."

I looked at him pleadingly, and though he could not for the darkness in the tent see my face clearly, he understood the silence to be my own way of pleading.

"It is well nigh morning and we have a long day ahead," came his noncommittal response. Whether or not he had intended to teach me a lesson I am not sure—though I think not, for Girad was not like that. "If I stay, neither of us will sleep any, and that will do no good for our travels. Tomorrow we cross the river of Egypt and you will find yourself in a new land!"



Something was in Samson's face. He shook his head vigorously to shoo away whatever irritating thing had landed near what remained of his eyelid. It returned. Small flying insects were among the more tedious disturbances of living this dreary prison life, but they were

disturbances nonetheless. Samson shook his head again, only to be further disturbed by the fact that whatever the thing was, it had a terrible case of persistence.

Finally, as he continued to walk, pressing and grinding the wheat as he did, he bent his head down to where his arms were, chained to the bar that he had pushed in circles so many weeks now. When his face met his arms, a smile slowly came to his face. His hair had grown! A single group of strands, banded together by the sweat that covered nearly the entire of his body all day, had formed into one irritating object. But no longer! A glimmer of hope, oh so small, but nevertheless present, told him that perhaps God would not forget him, and the return of his hair may mean the return of the gift God had once given him. He pushed the grindstone more vigorously.

"I dare not hope in anything but Thee, my God," he whispered, "but I pray the chance of deliverance will come speedily!"

He tried to push the thought aside, as he had so many times before, but once again he was reminded of his folly in trusting one whose heart was so cruel as to carry out his betrayal with a chilling obedience to whatever or whoever had demanded it of her.

He knew it had not been of my own doing, but that I was too weak and too full of self and pride to know the true meaning of a love that willingly gives its own life for another more beloved than one's self. All that would never excuse the fact that betrayal of a love so close and dear is a most cruel and heartless thing—and I had done it. My only redemption would be at the altar of mercy, but somehow, defeated and smitten in spirit as I was, I would not bow, not even bend a knee and put myself at the mercy of Samson and His God.

“Twice now I have been betrayed, though the latter was by far the more painful,” Samson mused aloud. “And both at the hands of the women of mine enemies. Why, my God?” he cried. “Have I done wrong? Have I sinned in this? Was I, in my sightedness, unable to see the error of my ways?—Errors which now seem so clear to me in this blinded state?”

It was the voice of God that answered to his heart in its full clarity. *“Errors they may be to you—yea, even to your fellow countrymen who think not as I do, nor perceive My will as I do. For the will of God is a fearsome thing, a mysterious thing. It twists and turns and none can know from the beginning where the path that I put thee upon will take thee. Take no more thought on thy sins, My son. They are lost within the greatness of My love, just as a droplet of water is lost within the vastness of the sea.”*

*“I have forgiven thee for yea a hundred times more than the sins which thou hast committed, and My love shall never be used up. One can draw upon it a thousand times, and each time a great amount take, but it shall never be drained of its abundance. And thou hast learned thy lesson, My son—that in thine own strength lieth no good thing, but in My strength lies your greatest power. You shall see the day of deliverance, My son. You shall see it.”*

The emotion welled up within his soul until it was so great that he could not help but burst forth with the proclamation that had been written on his heart in the silent darkness.

“Yes!” he shouted for the first time in the cell. “Yes! My God has indeed said it, and it shall surely be so!”

A guard came up and swung at the bars of his cell noisily, attempting to shut his mouth.

“Yes!” Samson shouted once more, lifting up his hands as much as he could in spite of his

## BETRAYAL

chains in humble gratitude and praise to God. "I thank Thee!"

Another stroke of the guard against the bars suggested that he should return to the grinding of the wheat, work that had kept him strong and in shape despite the horrible stench and humidity of the prison, as well as the meager portions of food.

He resumed his laborious task. The same steps, the same circle, the same grindstone and dreary prison walls which Samson could not see but whose presence he could feel—only this time he felt that life had been given back to him. It was the kind of joy that can only come to one who has been stripped of everything, and at length has been given back that which he then knows to be the most important.

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Girad and I stayed in Egypt nearly two months before it was time to return to our homeland. It was a time of shallow joys—shallow for me because I knew that I was only denying to myself that I had no need of what Samson had once brought into my life—not only the love he gave, but an assurance that came from someone whose noble convictions put my frivolous desires for fleeting pleasures to shame. He had a true sense of purpose that I, in my ambitious pursuit of life, had never been able to attain.

Perhaps if I repented and cast my life in a crumpled heap before Samson and his God, I would be redeemed. But no, I would not. Something within kept me from wanting freedom from my guilt, and thus the guilt would haunt me all my days. How long they would be, and how they would end, I knew not.

“Delilah, the caravan is ready. Girad sends for you.”

“Tell him I will come.” I lingered a moment in the small but luxuriously decorated home that had been ours for the past two months. And now I would be returning home, to the land where I had committed high treason to my heart, to love. Somehow I knew I was going to my sentence, and I knew my sentence was death. I sat down on the

bare marble floor in a manner of a servant, writing invisible letters upon the floor, telling Samson that I was sorry; that I never used the money; that I threw it in the stream; that I never meant for it to go this far. But what a foolish woman I was, to trust those who trusted me to betray! We all betrayed one another in some way, those lords and I.

“Delilah?” came Girad’s friendly voice in a tone of kindness I knew would not be towards me for long. He was the handsome young husband-to-be of a damsel who I had not met, but who I knew must be every bit more pure and whole and deserving than the foolish scoundrel that I was.

I continued writing pitiful things on the ground, and did not bother to look up and repay kindness with kindness, since the latter would not be mine for long, I argued. *Why invest?* my selfish thoughts argued over a pitifully insignificant exchange.

Pity filled Girad’s eyes as he saw me sitting there, with not even a quarter of the pomp that I normally possessed. I had not even bothered this day to dress myself in any sort of finery. After all, I was going to my death sentence, I concluded. I dressed in drab garments with no jewelry, and took no care to my hair or face. Girad walked over and picked me up, pulling me to my feet effortlessly. I hung limp in his arms.

He chuckled softly at the drama of the scene. “My Delilah, you must not judge yourself so harshly. You have not even bothered to adorn yourself as you usually do, and as you have done even on this journey. And now you sit on the floor like a maid. Come now,” he said as I finally firmed my footing. He pulled a strand of hair out of my face and looked at me gently for a moment.

“You look beautiful anyway, without all the rest of that. All you’re missing is the countenance, the merry countenance, my love.” I managed a very

feeble smile indeed, which for all its strength would have resembled that of a nearly dead person, happy to know they would soon find relief from a troubled life.

Girad smiled. "I suppose you have to start somewhere, though I assure you a fuller smile will do."

"I cannot be happy."

"I know it is hard, but why can you not at least try?"

"What prisoner who knows that he awaits death can be glad of it?" I said with all the melancholy of the mentally ill, or someone beside themselves with grief. I could no longer even pretend to be the Delilah I used to be. I had tried so hard, oh so very hard, and for a time had managed to feign gladness, but by and by the strength for that had faded as well. It seemed I was destined to be a mad woman.

"Am I mad, Girad?"

"No ... no. Not quite yet," he added, and laughed quietly and even kindly, knowing I still had within me tender roots of humor that had not been dried up.

I laughed a little, but then tears came to my eyes. Girad wiped them with his robe. "Tell me when you are ready to go. I will have them wait. But we do need to begin our journey some time soon."

I nodded and stifled a sob. "I am ready now."

Girad looked at me to ask if I was sure. I nodded. He put his arm around me and helped me out of the house and onto a camel with a covering that shaded me from the hot desert sun.



On and on the days seemed to stretch. The pitiful threads that had kept my life seamed in were unraveling around me all too quickly, and I could not stitch them up in time. It seemed there

was nothing I could do to stop it. The days seemed too long, until I began to think of what lay ahead of me at home. And then nothing could make them go slowly enough. I enjoyed Girad's company in a quiet way, not with the fashion of a partying woman. It was more in the fashion of a foolish child who had insisted on her lighthearted, foolish ways, and then had been made to suddenly face the realities of life for which she was so rudely unprepared.

The desert sands were behind us, and the familiar land of the Philistines, home to us all, lay ahead, like a demon, mocking my existence. I sighed as we carried on. Home was not far off.



"Where is that damned woman?" shouted Girad's father. "I promised Gorshek he could see her!"

"I'm sorry, Father. She is not well."

Girad's father grunted. "Well, you had better see to it that the very moment she is well, she is dressed in her most enticing apparel and brought to me. Yes..."—He started as if he had just struck upon a profound point—"...yes, something demure, nothing too outlandish or ... or Gorshek may not take to her. He likes little ones who will follow, or at least who appear to. I don't think he could handle anything more," Girad's father said, chuckling at the remembrance of Gorshek, who had a mind for nothing but merchandise. Gorshek was a meek and kind man by all appearances, though not a tenth as well versed in the art of handling people as he was in the art of making money—and his rotund figure was ample proof of his supply of wealth.

"Remember now, son, I am getting something out of this, and I will give you a portion of it. Gorshek has been looking for someone for a long time, and I think he will find Delilah quite



enchanting. I find her quite enchanting myself," he added under his breath, then said aloud, "But you should be motivated. You will have a portion of the profit Gorshek has promised me for finding him a woman!"

"I want nothing of that."

"What?!" Girad's father choked on his drink and shoed the women servants beside him away. Once they had left, he continued. "How can you defy me like that?"

Girad chuckled. "I did not defy you. I merely said you can have all of it, because I have no need for the money."

"But you want to be paid for your service to me, don't you?"

"No."

"Selfish, impudent, defiant, damnable youths you all are!"

Girad, calm as ever, turned to leave.

"Why are you leaving?"

"I am going to do your bidding—to see if she is well yet."

His father grunted his approval, then clapped his hands and the women servants came running back. "Ah, Girad, Girad, my boy..."

Girad stopped in his footsteps and turned around. His father winked. "Don't defile her, my boy, eh?" Then he chuckled and motioned for Girad to leave, which he did as quickly as he could.

Girad hurried to my house.

"Jeila, where is Delilah?"

"In her room."

"How does she fare?"

"She has been sleeping, eating nothing, only drinking the water that I put beside her bed."

"That is all?"

"She has never left her bed," Jeila said, with a worried look on her face.

"Is she truly ill? I was giving her more time."

"No," Jeila lowered her eyes. "She says she is afraid of death." She paused a moment before continuing. "I think something is very wrong, but she will not let me call a physician or a priest. I put the statue of Dagon in her room for blessing, but she demanded that I take it out. I put a small one in there anyway, and she broke it."

"Thank you, Jeila."

I had heard Girad's voice in the hall and so I was prepared when he entered the room.

"It is true; I am mad. Even Jeila thinks so, you heard her."

"She is only worried."

Girad walked over to where I lay, pale and thin. He knelt down and stroked my forehead.

"Delilah, you cannot lose yourself like this. You must eat. You must live."

"Can you ask your father if you can be with me instead?"

"What, and Gorshek have my wife-to-be?"

"Yes!"

"My father will not have it. He has demanded your presence. I told him you were ill, but as soon as you are recovered he wants you to see him. I can take you there if you wish."

I rolled over in my bed and put a few cushions over my head and screamed with all my heart in them. Girad winced. After a moment I took them off and sighed, my heart pounding and my face red.

"I will go now," I said with as much determination as I could muster. I threw off the covers and stood up.

Girad, wide-eyed that I had shown no modesty in front of him on this bright day, handed me a sheet to cover myself with.

"Never mind that, Girad, we have known all that is within each other's hearts for long, perhaps a little

baring of the body cannot harm us," I said, as I walked over to where Jeila had put out my garments each day in the hopes that I would find it within myself to get up.

Girad was a little startled, though nothing much could ever undo his calmness. "Very well then, as you would have it. Shall I also undress? Then it would all be fair; one last baring of our bodies," he jested. He meant nothing of the sort.

I stopped in my tracks and then turned around and walked the opposite direction of my clothing.

"Splendid idea, my friend, perhaps the best yet. Certainly far better than me marrying ... what's your father's old friend's name? The one old enough to be my grandfather, perhaps."

"Gorshek," Girad answered, and then added, "And remember, I did that as a favor, you ungrateful woman—to save you from the Philistine lords. If I don't get you married, you can be sure the likes of Nor will appropriate you for themselves, seeing as you have done them such good service."

"I do remember, Girad!" I retorted, perhaps a little too forcefully.

Knowing me all too well, Girad got up to leave.

"No, no. Oh please, Girad? In my last hour of freedom, will you not give me a moment of pleasure to last me a few steps until your father's house? And then I shall be on my own. No, of course not. I shall be with Gorshek, a fat, greedy—but wealthy!—man. What could someone like me want more than that?" I said sarcastically.

"Delilah, you have changed so much the last couple of months, I scarcely know you. Please, if you want me to do this, you must be somewhat yourself. Several months ago, and I would have gladly had more than just a moment of pleasure with you, but now ... I don't know. I am afraid you are somewhat beside yourself. And I cannot do this

when you are in such a state. I ... I ... well, it cannot be the thing for a sober man as myself to do. Do you understand?"

Girad's little speech brought myself quite back for the moment. It was a moment I would not lose for the world. I was about to sell my freedom for security and safety. Whether I had ever had a true freedom was not the question. Freedom as I knew it was about to be taken away, and I was to be forever caged.

I fought hard to regain some control over the waves that seemed to toss me to and fro. Girad watched as something of a transformation took place. Nothing out of the ordinary, just a reining in of the madness I had allowed myself to be drowned in.

After several moments had passed, while I stood as humbly as I could, as demurely and meekly, Girad sighed.

"And my father specifically told me before I left not to defile you," he laughed quietly. I laughed as well. "Only I know that you have already been defiled," he said, pulling me closer to where he sat, on the edge of my bed.

He stood up and I repeated, "...a baring of the bodies." I pushed Girad's robe slowly off his shoulders, untied the belt that hung about his midsection, and undressed him.

"I'm afraid I cannot have the pleasure," he said quietly, referring to the fact that I was already without clothing. I smiled as I imagined I would have had I been my normal self, and Girad smiled back, seeming to understand that I was trying. I suppose he was flattered that I wanted him that badly. But then I think his wise self, hidden behind that humorous, carefree shell, knew that I wanted comfort, the security of certainty, of one who I knew. I was about to lose it all.

Our lips met, and I was so glad Girad had agreed, though at one point the memory of Samson came to my mind and forced a tear out of my eye. I was quick to recover, though. We spent a great deal of the afternoon doing much better things than I had in my bed the past while.

“I think it is time to go and see my father,” Girad said at last. “I know this is difficult for you, but please do not offend him. I say this not for his sake—though you do possess quite a sharp and unruly tongue—but for yours. I know that Gorshek is not a choice man, but he is kind and you will be safe. I think that is the best that can be done, considering...”

“Considering what I have done to get myself thus far.” I finished his sentence despondently, melancholy at the very remembrance of my horrid ways.

“I would not have said it, but you have. Do you understand?”

“Girad, you have changed a thousand times over since ... since when, I cannot remember. But you have become a better person entirely, and I have become nothing more than a repentant witch.” Though I felt a good deal better, still I knew that I would never be truly happy. Perhaps I had stopped struggling against the strength of the chains of guilt that were condemned by some intangible law to bind me until I begged for forgiveness. Strange that I would not bow my head, but rather struggled to cope with the punishment.

“At least you have become repentant,” Girad replied, somewhat humorously, but I know that we only laughed quietly for a moment because it was all too true. “I am sure that Samson’s God, if He is as Samson said He is, has room for repentance. Perhaps you should ask Him.” I knew Girad only meant to converse, or so it seemed. It did not seem

to me that he would actually have such a grasp upon the workings of Samson's God. Or perhaps God somehow chose to speak a word or two through him, in the hopes that I might take heed. I didn't.

"This is the beginning of my death," I sighed, resigning myself to my fate. As soon as I stood up, somehow the trance that I had been in earlier began to come over me again. Quickly I leapt back into bed and under the covers.

"When I stand up to take even a step towards whatever it is that awaits me, I am terrified. Truly, I am. I cannot get up. Tell your father you pled and pled with me but I would not, that I was too ill. I look it, do I not? I have not eaten for days."

"I will have to bear the displeasure of my father if you do not do the thing now that you will eventually have to do anyway—if not for my father, than perhaps even for Ekkor. You choose. Come now, get up, get dressed. I shall take you there myself." He pulled me up and asked if he should call Jeila to help.

"No. I shall dress myself."

"Very well then," he said, reaching for his own garments and dressing himself quickly. "I shall wait for you by the entrance."

Within what seemed like moments we were at Girad's father's house. Though I was pale and a good deal thinner than was deemed healthy at that time, Girad's father seemed to be impressed. I would have at another time been quite disturbed if he had thought any less, but then at another time I would also have not been standing before Girad's father being approved, as it were, for marriage to his friend. I would have fought with everything that was within me either not to be married, or if I must, I would have managed to have Girad, I knew. But it is so strange sometimes how life suddenly takes a twist and you find yourself

upon a path you would never have considered taking. Feeling quite stripped of everything that had been me before, it was not difficult to appear modest and submissive. Precisely what Girad's father had in mind.

"She will more than do. A little thin and pale, but very, very beautiful. We'll have to fatten her up, though."

I would have snapped at him for treating me like a piece of cattle. But that was in some respects how my world worked.

"Like I said," Girad assured him, "she is normally not so slight. She has been ill."

"Very well then, very well."

"Will she meet Gorshek tonight?"

"No, no," laughed Girad's father. "We will have their wedding and celebration tomorrow night. It is all planned. I shall inform Gorshek and he shall be greatly happy. And," he added in a softer tone to Girad, "we shall be a great deal wealthier."

"*You shall be a great deal wealthier!*" Girad corrected him.

His father only chuckled and continued his train of thought. "Who can know how many times he has visited the temple and prayed for a wife! We have effected the answer to his prayers. Dagon shall receive many gifts from Gorshek, no doubt. As we shall also!"

Girad only glared.



The music, wild cheers and dancing, partying individuals made my head spin. I had still eaten nothing since I returned from Egypt, except for a small cake that Girad had forced me to eat before visiting his father for appraisal so that I would not faint in his presence.

"My, my dear, you are lovely," said a woman whose face I knew not but who I hoped was not

Gorshek's sister, who I heard largely ran their house. I would not have her running mine. The woman looked entirely bothersome and took the liberty of tasting some of the food that was set near me. "You don't mind, do you, dear?" she asked while she munched on the choice pieces she had picked from my plate. I smiled weakly.

"Now, now. My Gorshek is much luckier in getting you as his long-awaited bride, no doubt. But you are fairly blessed as well. He is kind, though somewhat stupid," she said frankly, but without so much as a wince. "Dagon seems to take kindly to him, though. He has become very wealthy, and it wasn't always that way."

"How long have you known him?" I asked, managing to force out a friendly question in an effort towards politeness.

"Known him? All his life! Why I am his sister!" The thought nearly made me faint. *These are indeed my punishments*, I thought to myself. My face must have shown some measure of disgust, for his sister chattered on.

"Don't be too disheartened, now. Some wives have had very cruel husbands, and it was not uncommon for them to be beaten or sent away or put down to maid status if they did not do exactly as they were told. I know of one husband who sacrificed his wife!"

I cringed.

"Oh no, I'm sure that won't happen to you. But, like I said, you should be thankful. And I'll be nearby, always ready to give you some company if you like."

I smiled, though inwardly I felt contempt. "Thank you!" I said simply.

She returned the smile and was off bothering someone else, much to my relief. The Philistines in this circle were not such great advocates of



tradition, so long as Dagon was present at anything important. He was a god to be feared, they said, and they praised him for the wonders that he had wrought in the spoiling of the Israelites. Of course, the land of the Israelites was very much their own, and they contested it had been given to them by their "one true God." It was a thing they preached with all the conviction in the world, while our people mocked them to scorn.

And so Dagon was present in all his transcendent glory, the great stone statue. The monument erected in the great temple was carved and painted by some of the best artists and sculptors of our land, but each copy was also magnificently sculpted. Beautiful workmanship as his images professed, he was still merely a statue and as far as I was concerned had not done anything to help me. I bordered on being insolent and irreverent at times, but was never too harshly judged for it.

Then the moment came that Gorshek and I were to be introduced and wed. The very thought frightened me, but my soul had been so racked with pain that I was nearly numb to it all. Several stern reprimands and preparatory conversations from Girad's father had brought out the leanest measure of politeness in me. All in all the horrors of late somehow greatly tamed my wild personality. I never returned to the way I was. The fire had died within, and I would never be the same Delilah, ever.

I smiled coyly and Gorshek grinned. He was not a severely handsome man, but he was not altogether uncomely. He was fairly short and stocky, though that did not present too great a problem, short in stature as I was.

"My, my!" he said, turning to Girad's father. "You have chosen for me a lovely one! All of what is mine is yours, my beauty," he said with all the charm he could muster. It was not much, but it

was an attempt, and he was sincere. That much I could tell.

Several months earlier I would not have minded the sincerity; such an offer would have brought great joy to my mind, though of course not to my eyes so as not to alarm them by revealing the intense greed that I possessed. But this time, it was just another bunch of words. What need would I have for such great things? My only purpose now was to exist, to watch my sorrowful life go by and know that it could have been every whit happier had I the courage not to betray Samson.

But history showed that I did not, and there was nothing I could do at this point to change it. Strangely enough, for all the remorse in the world, there were some things I would not do to change it. Or perhaps it was just that I could not bring myself to imagine that I would have changed it.

His wide grin, constant as it was while he looked deeply into my eyes—not in an overt fashion, but steadily gazing at me nonetheless—began to make me feel slightly awkward. I smiled back; and he kept smiling. My smile faded; his stayed.

Finally Girad's father slapped him on the back and just barely broke his gaze. "You are happy, then!"

"Yes, yes," came the kind, deep voice. "Yes, I am happy. You are a wise man and have chosen for me a lovely wife," he said with a broad grin.

The very description of my new role in life nearly made me swoon. But, I told myself, it was my punishment and I must bear it bravely. It could have been worse. He was a kind man at first glance, which also happened to be a very long and uncomfortable one.

In the fashion of the wealthy, there were some transactions to be done with regard to the wedding. Girad's father at length cleared his throat, eager

to get this started. He expected that, being an older man and a devout merchant, Gorshek would not be too overly consumed with love that he would not be able to get this business out of the way first.

"Of course, of course!" Gorshek replied, knowing what Girad's father meant by his throat-clearing. Still beaming, he winked at me, took a few steps forward, then kissed me passionately.

"I shall see you later," he said, the smile lingering while he reluctantly turned and walked away with Girad's father. Now that I was left alone, Girad came forward with a drink for me.

"I say Gorshek is in love!" he said with a smile.

"Nonsense. He just met me."

"You are someone whom a man like he—and not him only, but a good deal of others as well—would fall in love with quite instantly, especially if they knew the rest of their lives would be spent with you. It is a good thing to love the person you are with, is it not?"

"It is, and it is also a good thing not to betray them if you want to continue to be with them," came my bitter rejoinder, one of the few I'd uttered since I was no longer capable of anything it seemed save expressions of utter and incurable melancholy.

Girad, I knew, would say nothing.

"Well then," I said, sorry that my lips had bid my soul enter the realm of regret at having made my dear one and only friend at this moment slightly awkward. "I'm sorry. I shall not spoil the evening for talk of that sad thing called love."

"It is not a sad thing, now, though I drink to the fading of those painful memories that cause you so much grief. It would be a good thing to see you joyous."

"Was I ... was I ever truly joyous?"

After a long moment in thought, Girad replied

slowly, "Only you would truly know if you were joyous, but you did seem capable of enjoying a good thing."

"Ah, well, it seems I have lost that ability."

"And for that I am sorry, for it lent you a good deal more beauty."

"Oh?"

Girad tried very hard not to laugh, knowing that he had appealed to my vanity, but the merriment crept out of both corners of his mouth.

I sighed and smiled. "I would have hit you a long time ago, or spilt your drink, perhaps, but since nothing much holds any great appeal for me, I shall have to laugh with you at your poor joke."

"Laugh then; that was the purpose," Girad said sheepishly. Poor man, he was so fraught with concern over this poor friend of his who had turned from a confident, smooth, charming woman into a melancholic mad one, capable of only the slightest courtesy.

"I think I shall have to keep my lips closed, for whenever I open them, horrors and remorse shall flow out," I mused.

Soon Gorshek could be heard returning with Girad's father, and so Girad got up. "I think I shall leave you now, though I wish it were otherwise. For all the years we have known each other, it would have been a good thing if we could have known each other *better*. But I wish for the best for you."

"Thank you, Girad."

"Ah! The beautiful one," said Gorshek as he walked up to greet me, beaming again.

"The beautiful one is called Delilah and she is your bride," Girad's father reminded him in a somewhat patronizing manner. Gorshek didn't seem to be easily bothered.

"Of course, of course. Delilah!" he said, taking

my face in his hands and kissing my forehead. Though this was not at all unusual, I was more than young enough to be his daughter, and for one such as I that was not an easy concept to come to grips with.

As Gorshek turned to receive a drink, Girad's father turned to me and whispered, "You may wonder how such a man so mentally un-endowed can be so wealthy, but he is truly a genius in matters of merchandise. You will have to find your pleasure in his gifts. But he is a kind man."

I smiled in acknowledgement. *This is surely going to be a terrible and dreary life*, I thought to myself. *It is fortunate indeed that there is not a thing in the world that I want anymore. He will have no trouble with me.*

And indeed he did not. I was the most pleasant, placid little woman I could possibly be. I had dulled my personality to the point that I fit into the routine of living as one of his possessions in his luxuriously decorated house, servants tending to my every need. Jeila also was there, but she was no longer my personal servant. She became the one above all the other servants, a simple advancement which made her heart know more joy than I had probably ever known. Such happiness the simpler people enjoy, that we who are higher-born never do, because we are all too content with what we are and never with what we have.



It had not been many months since we were married and there was no sign of any children—the only thing that he was anxious for, for childbearing was a great sign of blessing in our time. But, simple man that he was, he seemed resolutely content in my company, seeing as I was not only a wife to him, but also the daughter he might have had had he married at a younger age.

## BETRAYAL

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Samson's hair had now been growing for some time. Each day, guards accompanied the jailers as they brought food to the prisoners. Among them was Garmel.

"Give that man no food!" said Garmel one day to the man near Samson.

"We must give *all* the prisoners food. You are in no position to instruct us, only accompany us."

"Tell me that again as I throw you against the bars a few times."

"Very well," came the feeble response.

A little while later, Garmel and another guard on duty opened Samson's cell.

The one who accompanied Garmel spoke hesitantly, "Garmel, if the warden returns we will be severely punished."

"The warden won't return until after we're done. It will only take a few moments." Then Garmel turned to Samson. "Dizzy?" he sneered.

Samson said nothing, though he recognized the voice.

"I can take care of that, probably give you a bit of time off—in the unconscious state!"

Still Samson said nothing.

"Need some help to speak?" Garmel plowed a full fist into Samson's cheek. Just as it impacted, Samson cocked his head fiercely towards Garmel's

fist. The impact sent Garmel back a few paces. Garmel looked at Samson, then at his fist, in total astonishment.

"Maybe this wasn't such a good idea," said the other guard quickly. Garmel immediately agreed, and they both hurried out of the prison before Samson did them both damage.

Moments later the warden came shuffling in. "Samson!"

"Yes."

"Seems they want you out there for some sort of big celebration of your capture," the warden casually announced. "I'm to bring you out there. Actually, I think I'll have Garmel do that. Garmel!"

Samson smiled at the thought of Garmel having to take him. Then he smiled even more broadly when hope surged within him. *My time of deliverance has come!*

"You and a few of the men—we have orders to escort Samson to the Temple of Dagon. Take him!"

Garmel became very frightened. He ordered the men to load Samson into a wagon and to take him to the main temple.

"I'll sit in the back, or no, perhaps the front ... er, I'll get my horse," Garmel stuttered.

Samson just smiled, and Garmel said nothing the rest of the way. He had only the energy to look nervously at Samson every now and then, as he rode on his horse beside the wagon.



Gorshek wanted to bring me to this gala event at the Temple of Dagon. I reluctantly came along.—So reluctantly, in fact, that I made us quite late. Never mind Gorshek; he was all kind smiles, though as usual he rarely spoke to me of anything more than how beautiful I was and how much he adored me. By the time we arrived, there were thousands of people within the enormous temple



and on its roof, ready to observe whatever spectacle would be happening below.

“What is this celebration for?” I asked.

“Why, lovely one,” Gorshek said. “It’s Dagon’s celebration day. He surely has much to celebrate, for has not the great enemy of our people been captured and humiliated?”

In that moment I wished that my heart could have been broken into such tiny fragments that it would have completely disappeared. The great façade that I had barely managed to keep up began crumbling down around me. My eyes burned with tears at the thought of celebrating the capture and blindness of one who had at one point held me within his embrace, and within his heart. And I had tossed him aside.—No, worse yet, I betrayed him. He gave me a piece of his heart and I willingly placed it in the hands of his enemies. All the horrible memories and feelings of remorse flooded my mind. I wanted to run, run, run until I reached the end of the world, and then jump into the void beyond.

A tear stole out of my eye—one small tear, the beginning of a huge torrent of tears that threatened to drown me in their cruel whirlpool. I quickly wiped it away.

“My beauty? Is there something the matter?”

“Oh no, not at all,” I smiled.

“It is exciting, is it not?” he responded, figuring that I had been caught up in the excitement of everything. I could only smile and nod, hoping that would satisfy him.

And then the crowds quieted. Up at the top of the great steps leading into the temple, I saw a clearing being made. Every part of my body was numb with terror. It was Samson! They had brought Samson!

As soon as he was within sight of everyone, the

crowd began to jeer. Some began to throw things. A lad who acted as his guide now led him over to the two central pillars of the temple, where he could be seen by all. He stood, tall and valiant, his head once again covered with long, albeit matted hair; all those things that I so loved about him still there—except for his eyes. Even if by some miracle I was ever to be held again in his embrace, never again would I be able to look into his eyes and feel through them all the tender love he was capable of.

Completely overcome with emotion at the sight of him, and now wanting to throw myself at his feet and beg forgiveness—his forgiveness and that of his God—I tore away from Gorshek and pushed my way through the crowds.

“Samson! Samson!” I shouted. In a moment all the sadness that had been mine for every moment of these days since his betrayal seemed to fade away, in my eagerness to run to him, fall at his feet and beg forgiveness. I didn’t care if he would kick me aside, or if he would slay me right there, or if the Philistine lords who no doubt were in some position to see him and those around him, would see me and slay me. All that no longer mattered at all. I only wanted him to know that though I had not suffered as greatly as he, I had suffered knowing all that I had done to him, and now I begged forgiveness. At least I knew I had to ask, even if he turned me away. Then I would know that I had repented. Until then I had been too frightened, too proud. But now ... now was my chance. Even if he bid me kneel and pray to his God, I would do it. The very sight of him brought repentance to my soul instantly.

“Samson!” I screamed through the roaring and jeering crowds. People pushed me aside, but I kept struggling through till I got to the front of the crowds near where he stood. Still not close enough for him

to hear me, but close enough for me to see and be all the more convinced that this was what I had to do to redeem myself as much as I could be redeemed.

And then I heard it, though I do not know if his God had afforded me a miracle to hear it from that far away or if Samson did indeed speak that loudly, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes."

A chilling knowledge of what was going to happen came over me as he lifted up his two strong arms and pressed them against the pillars. Tears were streaming down my face by this time.

"Samson! Samson! I beg forgiveness. I deserve it not, but I beg it of you." I shouted with all my might as still I forced my way to the front, hoping that I could make it to his feet in time, even to die at his feet, at last bowed in humility, begging forgiveness. I did not know not if he heard me, but my next cry was drowned out by his great shout, "Let me die with the Philistines!"

With all his might he pushed each arm against each of the pillars, pushing further and further out. Some were still jeering. Some woman called out, "His hair has returned! His power has returned!" And then the rumble of the stones began, and the beams thundered, for it was a great and mighty temple. People started screaming and running, though they would never make it off the roof or out of the temple or even from beneath the heavy stone boulders that hung over the porches.

I stood still, a strange peace having come over me. I knew that there was much to regret, but somehow I knew I had been forgiven. I looked at Samson, tears still running down my face. All this happened so slowly, yet it was only a matter of

seconds before the weight of the temple and its great stones and statues came down upon us and crushed us. But in those few seconds, the miracle happened.

Samson saw! He had no eyes, but before the temple fell, as it was falling, God granted his spirit a strange reprieve that he might see the destruction, and as he did, he also saw my tear-stained face, begging for forgiveness. He still stood there, encased in the mortal frame that I loved so dearly and that had served him so well. It was as if he were a spirit, for he needed no earthly eyes to see, yet without knowing death, he saw. Upon his face flickered a smile, and then it was over.

A great number of lords and rulers of the Philistines were crushed beneath the stones of that great temple to Dagon—not great in its majesty, for it was a foolish memorial to a stone that served as lord and god to those of us who were too frightened to believe in the one true God. But under the roof of this idol, God perfected our judgment, and at this one time more of us were slain than God had used Samson to slay in all his life hitherto.

When his brothers and those of his father's household heard the news, they came up and found his body, and laid him to rest with his father and mother. And I was left, along with the many others who had been crushed beneath the weight of God's wrath. His people had been delivered.

## EPILOGUE

### *His Eyes*

*A look, but not only.*

*More like two mortals  
Each peering into  
The soul of the other,  
Sending secret messages—  
The eyes being the windows,  
The hearts being the lovers.*

*The tender look held my heart,  
And over and over enchanted it.  
My distrust it dispelled and  
My life it warmed.  
Then a moment passed  
And the look would be no more.*

*And then when I looked away,  
Forgot the eyes—  
The eyes that told me love was real,  
Was the day I fell for the lies.  
And in a painfully quick moment,  
The memory of which would be long,  
The look was suddenly to be no more.*

*Those gentle eyes,  
They looked into mine  
And sent a message,  
Not to my mind but to my heart.  
But I looked away for a moment,  
Forgot the eyes that told me  
Of the heart's trust.  
And then the look was gone...*

BETRAYAL

*And the only look that remained  
Was the one that bid me weep.  
It was the sad reflection of my own eyes  
In the mirrored pool of truth.  
All the hope of love killed at its peak,  
By the very one who sought it out.  
And the strangest twist,  
In trading his heart for mine,  
I'd also lost my own.  
And the look was gone.*

*I hope one day  
I'll be pardoned and see  
Into his heart through his eyes.  
I will beg with mine if he ever could,  
To please forgive my lies.  
—Do I dream a dream too bold  
To hope to see that tender look again?  
Ah, faith! I remember  
—Once his eyes, they told me:  
Our boldest dreams come true in  
Heaven.*

## ENDNOTES

**Samson, the Nazarite** – The biblical term “Nazarite” is used to describe someone who is consecrated to God by a special vow. According to the Old Testament Book of Numbers, chapter 5, one who takes such a vow upon himself for a time is instructed to abstain from strong drink and any produce of grapes, to not cut his hair, and to stay away from dead bodies, until the time of his consecration has passed.

**Question: But Samson was meant to be a Nazarite for his whole life. Didn't he come near plenty of dead bodies? And in this story, he even drinks wine at times.**

***Answer, Jesus speaking:***

As a young man, Samson was very passionate, very impulsive. In his older years, he mellowed somewhat. But because I knew it would be difficult for him to abide by the stricter rules of a Nazarite, I gave him the leeway of having to adhere only to a single rule—that of not touching his hair with the razor.

The consecration was his mother's part, and this vow of Nazarite consecration was also kept by Samson for much of his childhood. But as he became a man, and started discovering his strengths and passions, I allowed him the leeway of foregoing the other, stricter rules, so long as he did not break the one manifestation and token of his consecration as a Nazarite, and that was his hair.

So yes, he drank—more so in his youth than in his older days, but even then he drank, though with moderation. And, of course, he came near plenty of dead bodies. Samson was much more a man given to following My Spirit when it welled up within him than of keeping the particulars of the law. He saw himself as a special case in many instances. And he truly was—a special and unusual judge that I used to deliver My people, and bring them the satisfaction of seeing My revenge on those who had touched the apple of My eye. ■

