



The Song  
that Made  
the King

A TALE OF SOLOMON AND SHULAMIT

## Introduction

This short novel, or novella grew out of studying Psalm 72 which was prayed or sung at Solomon's coronation. It expresses a set of Biblical priorities consistently expressed in the Torah and throughout the Old and New Testaments and seldom practiced by political elites. I was fascinated to think about where and how Solomon, born into privilege and power in about the 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> year of King David's reign and whose coronation would have taken place 20 to 24 years later, would get these ideas. They were certainly expressed in the Torah, but would that make them front and center in his mind on coronation?

When we read that after a great beginning Solomon really failed while being led away by large numbers of wives and concubines he chose even though the Torah forbade it, we get perhaps a clue how he might have been influenced well. One woman in his life is celebrated in romantic poetry that sounds like a young man caught up in his first love, the love of his life. Taking these two thoughts, and clues from the Song of Solomon, I tried to write a story that narrates the poetry back into a story that would fit the history and culture, and the poetic clues, and prepare Solomon, born to privilege to be the king who prays for wisdom and acts in justice and righteousness for the poor, the widow, and the oppressed.

This story, *The Song that made a King*, is my attempt to connect those dots. I hope you enjoy the story and are challenged to live out the righteousness called for on behalf of the poor, the widow, and the oppressed.

# Chapter 1 — Shulamit of the Vineyards

The sun had already climbed above the ridge when Shulamit stepped into the lower terraces, basket on her hip, pruning knife at her belt. Morning light spilled across the vines, turning the dew into a thousand small fires. She loved this hour — before the shouting began, before her brothers started arguing about yields and buyers and whether the king’s tax collectors would come early this year.

She knelt beside a young vine, brushing her fingers over its leaves. “You’re late this season,” she murmured. “But we’ll get you there.” Plants responded to patience. People did too, though not always as quickly.

A pair of children hovered at the edge of the field, barefoot, thin, pretending not to watch her. Their mother had died the previous winter; their father worked wherever he could find a day’s wage. Shulamit straightened and called to them.

“Come,” she said. “If you’re hungry, don’t stand there like ghosts.”

They hesitated, then approached. She handed them each a handful of grapes — not the best clusters, but not the worst either. “Take from the edges,” she told them. “Leave the center rows for harvest. And don’t let my brothers see you or they’ll start counting what’s missing.”

The older child nodded solemnly. “We’ll be careful.”

“Good.” She ruffled his hair. “And tell your father there’s work tomorrow. Half-day. Fair pay.”

His eyes widened. “Truly?”

“Truly. But he must come early.”

They ran off, clutching their treasure. Shulamit watched them go, then returned to her vines. She didn’t think of herself as generous. This was simply how the world ought to work: the strong lifting the weak, the land feeding more than the owners, the harvest belonging to hands beyond her own. Her mother had taught her that. Her mother had said it often enough: If the Holy One watches the sparrow, how much more the widow and the orphan? Her mother had also taught her to keep her voice steady when her brothers grew sharp, and to keep her dignity when strangers stared too long at her sun-darkened skin.

“Do not gaze at me because I am dark,” she whispered, half amused. The sun had written its story on her, and she bore it gladly.

By midmorning the workers had arrived — men from the village, a few widows who needed coin, two cousins who never stopped talking. Shulamit divided the tasks, pairing the slower ones with the quick, the older with the young. She kept the wages fair and the hours honest. Her

brothers grumbled that she was too soft, but they also knew the workers came back because of her.

“Shulamit,” one of the widows called, “the north terrace is short on water.”

“I’ll see to it.” She wiped her hands on her tunic and climbed the stone steps to the upper rows. The cistern there was low — not dangerously, but enough to worry her. She knelt, checking the channel that fed it. A stone had shifted, blocking part of the flow. She pried it loose, letting the water run freely again.

As she worked, she heard footsteps on the road below — a traveler, perhaps, or a shepherd moving his flock. She didn’t look up. Strangers passed often enough. Some stared. Some asked for directions. Some tried to flirt. She had learned to ignore most of them.

But this one paused.

She felt it before she saw it — the stillness of someone watching not with hunger or mockery, but with curiosity. She kept her eyes on the channel, pretending not to notice.

The traveler lingered a moment longer, then moved on.

Shulamit exhaled and stood, brushing dust from her knees. Whoever he was, he would be gone by the time she returned to the lower terraces. And she had work to do — wages to count, gleaning rows to mark, workers to settle before the heat grew fierce.

She walked back down the steps, the scent of crushed leaves rising around her. The day was young, and the vines were calling. She did not know that the traveler would return. She did not know that her life — the ordinary, honest, sun-browned life she carried with such quiet strength — would soon become the hinge on which a prince’s heart would turn.

For now, she was simply Shulamit of the vineyards.

And the kingdom was better for it.

## Chapter 2 — The Prince Who Walked Unseen

Solomon slipped out of the palace before dawn, moving through the quiet corridors with the ease of someone who had spent years mapping every shadow. The servants would not miss him yet. His tutors would assume he was studying. His father would be praying or meeting with commanders. No one would think to look for him in the streets.

He loved the palace, in a way. Loved the cedar beams, the carved lions, the scent of incense that clung to the halls. But he had grown up inside a world where every gesture was watched, every word weighed, every silence interpreted. Even as a boy, he had felt the weight of expectation settle on his shoulders like an invisible cloak.

*One day you will judge the people.  
One day you will defend the weak.  
One day you will rule with righteousness.*

He wanted to be that man. He just didn't know what such a man looked like.

So, he walked.

Jerusalem was waking as he passed through the lower markets. Bakers were pulling flatbread from ovens. A potter's apprentice swept clay dust from the doorway. A shepherd urged his flock toward the hills. No one bowed. No one whispered. No one measured him against David.

He breathed easier.

He followed the road north, letting the city fall behind him. The air grew cleaner. The hills opened before him, terraced and green. Vineyards clung to the slopes like steps carved into the earth. He had seen vineyards before — the palace had its own — but those were tended by servants who never forgot who watched them.

These hills felt different. Honest. Unstaged.

He heard voices carried on the wind — laughter, the clatter of baskets, the rhythmic snip of pruning knives. Workers were already in the fields, their silhouettes moving between the vines.

Solomon slowed.

He liked watching people who didn't know they were being watched. Not to spy — he had no taste for secrets — but because it was the only way to see life without performance. In the palace, everyone performed. Out here, people simply lived.

A woman's voice rose above the others — steady, warm, unhurried. She was giving instructions, but gently, as if she expected people to succeed. Solomon followed the sound without meaning to.

He reached a bend in the road and saw her.

She stood on a terrace just above him, sun catching the dark waves of her hair. Her skin was bronzed from long days outdoors, her arms strong, her movements sure. She was showing a widow how to tie a vine so it wouldn't snap under the weight of the coming fruit. The widow nodded, grateful. Shulamit — he heard the name called from across the rows — pressed a small pouch of wages into the woman's hand and closed her fingers around it.

Solomon felt something shift inside him.

Not desire — not yet — but recognition. Here was someone who lived the Torah without reciting it. Someone who understood the land, who honored the poor, who treated labor not as burden but as covenant. She moved with the quiet authority of a person who had never been taught to shrink.

He watched as she knelt to speak to a child who had wandered too close to the tools. She handed him a few grapes from the outer rows — the gleaning rows — and sent him off with a smile. The child ran, laughing.

Solomon's throat tightened.

He had been taught the laws of gleaning. He had memorized the commands about widows and orphans. He had recited the passages about honest wages and justice for the poor. But he had never seen them lived with such ease, such instinct, such... joy.

He whispered her name under his breath.

Shulamit.

Peaceful one. Or perhaps, *the one who brings peace.*

He stayed hidden beneath a fig tree, watching her move through the vines with the confidence of someone who belonged to the land and to the people who worked it. She did not know she was being observed. She did not know a prince was watching her. She did not know she was already reshaping the imagination of the man who would one day rule.

Solomon felt something unfamiliar rising in him — a longing not for her beauty, though she was beautiful, but for her clarity. Her steadiness. Her way of seeing people.

He wanted to be the kind of man she would not have to fear.

He wanted to be the kind of king she would not have to hide from.

He did not know that this was the beginning of love. He only knew that the world felt sharper now, more real, as if he had been walking half-awake until this moment.

He stayed until the sun climbed higher and the heat pressed against his shoulders. Only then did he turn back toward Jerusalem, walking slowly, reluctant to leave the hills behind.

He did not know he would return.

He did not know that the woman in the vineyard would become the measure by which he judged his own heart.

For now, he was simply a prince who walked unseen.

And something in him had begun to change.

## Chapter 3 — The First Words

Solomon returned to the vineyard two days later.

He told himself it was curiosity. He told himself he wanted to see how the terraces were managed, how the workers were treated, how the land looked when no one was performing for a prince. But as he walked the familiar road, he knew he was lying to himself.

He wanted to see *her* again.

The morning was cool, the sky pale with early light. Workers were already in the fields, their voices drifting across the terraces. Solomon kept to the lower path, unsure whether he hoped to be noticed or feared it.

He reached the bend in the road where he had seen her before.

She was there.

Shulamit stood on the middle terrace, tying a vine to a new trellis. Her hair was pulled back with a strip of cloth, her sleeves rolled to her elbows. She worked quickly, efficiently, humming under her breath. A widow beside her was sorting cuttings into bundles.

Solomon hesitated.

He had spoken to hundreds of people in his life — commanders, judges, foreign envoys, tutors, priests. He had never struggled for words. But now his throat felt tight, as if the right words were hiding somewhere behind his ribs.

He stepped forward.

A loose stone shifted under his sandal.

Shulamit looked up.

Her eyes were dark, steady, assessing. Not startled. Not flustered. Simply aware.

“You’re back,” she said.

Her voice was exactly as he remembered — warm, unhurried, with a hint of amusement.

Solomon swallowed. “I... was walking this way.”

“That’s convenient,” she said, turning back to her vine. “Most travelers go the other direction.”

He blinked. “Do they?”

“Yes. Unless they’re lost.” She glanced at him again. “Are you lost?”

He almost laughed. “Not exactly.”

“Good.” She tied the last knot and stepped back to inspect her work. “I don’t have time to rescue lost men today.”

The widow beside her chuckled.

Solomon felt heat rise to his face. He wasn’t used to being spoken to like this — plainly, without deference, without calculation. It was strangely refreshing.

“I didn’t mean to intrude,” he said.

“You’re not intruding,” Shulamit replied. “You’re just standing in the wrong place.”

He looked down. His foot was on a young vine.

He stepped back quickly. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry,” she said. “Just don’t kill my vines.”

The widow laughed again.

Solomon found himself smiling — a real smile, not the polite one he wore in the palace. “I’ll try not to.”

Shulamit studied him for a moment, as if deciding whether he was worth more conversation. “You’re not from around here.”

“No.”

“You walk like someone who’s used to being followed.”

He froze.

She didn’t say it accusingly. Just matter-of-fact, like noting the weather.

“I’m not being followed today,” he said carefully.

“Good,” she said. “People who are followed tend to make others nervous.”

He nodded, unsure what to say.

She wiped her hands on her tunic. “If you’re looking for work, we’re full today. If you’re looking for water, the cistern is up the steps. If you’re looking for trouble, try the next village.”

“I’m not looking for trouble.”

“Everyone says that,” she said. “Right before they find it.”

He laughed — a short, surprised sound. “You’re very direct.”

“Someone has to be,” she said. “My brothers aren’t.”

He wanted to ask about her family, her work, her life. He wanted to ask why she gave wages with such dignity, why she treated widows like equals, why she left the edges of the field untouched. But he didn’t know how to ask without revealing who he was.

So he said the safest thing he could think of.

“You run this vineyard well.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Do you know anything about vineyards?”

“A little.”

“Enough to judge mine?”

He hesitated. “Enough to admire it.”

Something softened in her expression — not much, just a flicker, like a candle catching a draft.

“Admiration is easy,” she said. “Work is harder.”

“I don’t mind work.”

She gave him a long, measuring look. “We’ll see.”

He felt the words settle inside him like a seed.

*We’ll see.*

No one had ever spoken to him that way — not as a prince, not as a symbol, not as a future king, but as a young man who might or might not prove himself.

He wanted to prove himself.

Not to impress her. Not to win her. But because something in her steadiness made him want to be steady too. Something in her clarity made him want to be clear. Something in her strength made him want to be strong in the right ways.

She turned back to her vines. “If you’re going to stand there, you might as well hand me that bundle.”

He blinked. “What bundle?”

She pointed with her chin. “The one by your foot.”

He picked it up and climbed the terrace steps toward her.

It was the first step of many.

And though neither of them knew it yet, the kingdom would never be the same.

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Solomon returned the next morning.

He told himself it was because he wanted to learn more about vineyards. He told himself it was because he needed to understand the people he would one day rule. He told himself many things.

But when he reached the bend in the road and saw Shulamit lifting a basket of cuttings onto her hip, he knew the truth.

He had come to see *her*.

She noticed him immediately. “You again,” she said, not unkindly.

“Me again,” he admitted.

She handed him a bundle of twine. “If you’re going to stand there, you might as well make yourself useful.”

He tied vines beside her for an hour. She corrected his knots twice. The third time, she didn’t need to.

When he left, he felt lighter than he had in months.

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He came again two days later.

This time she didn’t pretend to be surprised. “You walk a great deal for someone who doesn’t know where he’s going.”

“Maybe I’m learning,” he said.

“Maybe,” she allowed.

They worked in companionable silence. A widow approached with a question about her wages. Shulamit answered gently, counted the coins twice, and pressed them into the woman’s hand with a blessing.

Solomon watched the exchange with a strange ache in his chest.

He had seen justice written on scrolls. He had never seen it lived with such tenderness.

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On his fourth visit, she handed him a pruning knife.

“You’re ready,” she said.

“For what?”

“To stop pretending you’re only here to watch.”

He took the knife. His hands were steady, but something inside him wasn’t.

They worked side by side. She corrected his grip once, then let him learn by doing. When he cut a vine too sharply, she didn’t scold. She simply said, “The land forgives, if you do better next time.”

He nodded, swallowing the unexpected tightness in his throat.

No one in the palace spoke to him that way — as if he were capable of learning, not merely destined for greatness.

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By the seventh visit, the workers had stopped glancing at him with suspicion. They greeted him with nods, with jokes, with the easy familiarity of people who judged a man by his hands, not his title.

Shulamit still didn’t know who he was.

He found he didn’t want her to.

She spoke to him plainly, without fear or flattery. She asked him questions no one else dared ask.

“Why do you walk alone?”

“Why do you look at the world as if you’re searching for something?”

“Why do you listen more than you speak?”

He didn't know how to answer. No one had ever asked him such things.

One morning, as they worked the upper terrace, she said, "You're not like the men from the city."

"How so?"

"You pay attention."

He felt the words settle inside him like a blessing.

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It was on his tenth visit that he realized he was lovelorn.

He had been tying vines beside her, the sun warm on their backs, the scent of crushed leaves rising around them. She laughed at something one of the workers said — a bright, unguarded laugh — and he felt something inside him shift, as if a door had opened in a room he hadn't known existed.

He froze.

Shulamit glanced at him. "Are you well?"

"Yes," he said too quickly.

She studied him for a moment, then returned to her work.

He watched her hands — steady, capable, gentle. He watched the way she spoke to the widows, the way she guided the younger workers, the way she left the edges of the field untouched for the poor. He watched the way she lived the Torah without announcing it.

And he knew.

He was in love.

Not with her beauty, though she was beautiful. Not with her competence, though she was capable. Not with her strength, though she was strong.

He was in love with the way she made him want to be a better man.

He was in love with the way she made the world feel honest.

He was in love with the way she saw people — and the way she saw *him*, even without knowing who he was.

He was in love with the way she made him feel like he could become the kind of king he longed to be.

He tied another vine, hands trembling slightly.

Shulamit didn't notice.

But the kingdom would, one day.

Because this was the moment — quiet, unremarkable, hidden among the vines — when the heart of a future king began to turn toward justice.

## **Shulamit's Thoughts After His Tenth Visit**

That evening, after the workers had gone home and the shadows stretched long across the terraces, Shulamit sat on the low stone wall outside her family's house, rubbing the ache from her hands. The day had been long, but not unpleasant. The vines were healthy. The widows had left with full wages. The gleaning rows were marked for the poor.

And the stranger had come again.

She didn't know what to make of him.

He worked hard enough, though he was clearly not used to labor. His hands were soft, his posture too upright, his speech too careful. He listened more than he talked. He watched people with a kind of hunger, as if he were trying to memorize the shape of their lives.

He was kind. That much she could tell.

But kindness could be a mask. She had seen men pretend gentleness to get what they wanted. She had seen charm used like a blade.

She didn't think he was like that.

But she wasn't sure.

She sighed and leaned back against the wall, letting the cool stone press into her spine. The sky above her was streaked with rose and gold. A breeze carried the scent of crushed leaves and distant cooking fires.

She closed her eyes.

Why did he unsettle her?

Not because he was handsome — though he was. Not because he was attentive — though he was that too. It was something else. Something quieter. Something she didn't have a name for.

He made her feel seen.

And that was dangerous.

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## **A Conversation with Her Mother**

Her mother came out of the house carrying a small clay cup of mint tea. She handed it to Shulamit and sat beside her.

“You’re quiet tonight,” her mother said.

Shulamit took a sip. “Long day.”

“Mm.” Her mother waited. She had the patience of someone who had raised many children and pruned many vines. “And the young man?”

Shulamit stiffened. “What young man?”

Her mother gave her a look. “The one who keeps showing up.”

“He’s just... curious.”

“About vineyards?”

“About people, I think.”

Her mother nodded slowly. “And about you.”

Shulamit felt heat rise to her cheeks. “He’s a stranger.”

“For now.”

“He doesn’t say much.”

“Some men speak with their silences.”

Shulamit frowned. “That’s not helpful.”

Her mother laughed softly. “You want helpful? Fine. Tell me this: does he treat the workers well?”

“Yes.”

“Does he speak to the widows with respect?”

“Yes.”

“Does he look at you like you’re a prize to be won?”

“No,” Shulamit said, surprised by the certainty in her own voice. “He looks at me like he’s... learning.”

Her mother’s eyes softened. “Then be careful, but don’t be afraid.”

Shulamit stared at her tea. “I don’t know what he wants.”

“Then ask yourself what *you* want.”

She didn’t answer.

Her mother touched her hand. “A good man is not the one who makes your heart race. A good man is the one who makes your heart wise.”

Shulamit swallowed. “I don’t know if he’s a good man.”

“Not yet,” her mother agreed. “But he might be becoming one.”

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## Solomon’s Return the Next Morning

When Solomon arrived the next morning, Shulamit was already in the lower terraces, sorting cuttings into piles. She didn’t look up when he approached.

“You’re early,” she said.

“So are you.”

She tied a bundle with more force than necessary. “I had work to do.”

He hesitated. “Did I... do something wrong?”

She glanced at him then — a quick, searching look. “No. You just... confuse me.”

He blinked. “I confuse you?”

“Yes.” She set down the bundle. “You work like someone who wants to prove himself. You listen like someone who’s hungry for truth. But you carry yourself like someone who’s never had to fight for anything.”

He opened his mouth, then closed it.

She stepped closer, studying him with a frankness that made his breath catch. “Who are you, really?”

He felt the question like a blade — not sharp enough to wound, but sharp enough to cut through pretense.

“I’m someone trying to learn,” he said quietly.

She held his gaze for a long moment, then nodded once. “Then learn.”

She handed him a pruning knife.

And he took it.

Not because he needed to.

But because he wanted to be the kind of man she could trust.

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The sun was low when the day’s work ended. The workers drifted home, laughing, calling farewells. Shulamit stayed behind to coil the ropes and gather the tools. Solomon lingered too, though he pretended to be checking the trellises.

She watched him from the corner of her eye. He was restless today — quieter, distracted, as if carrying a weight he hadn’t yet named.

When she finished tying the last bundle, she turned to him. “You’re troubled.”

He froze. “Am I?”

“Yes.” She wiped her hands on her tunic. “You’ve been troubled all day. Say what you need to say.”

He swallowed. “I haven’t been honest with you.”

Her stomach tightened. “About what?”

He stepped closer, but not too close. “About who I am.”

She felt the world tilt slightly. “You’re not a traveler.”

“No.”

“You’re not a shepherd.”

“No.”

“You’re not a laborer.”

He shook his head.

She crossed her arms. “Then who are you?”

He took a breath — the kind a man takes before stepping into cold water.

“My name is Solomon son of David.”

The words hit her like a blow.

She stared at him, unable to speak. The prince. The heir. The one the prophets spoke of. The one the elders prayed for. The one whose name carried the weight of a kingdom.

She stepped back. “You lied to me.”

“I hid the truth,” he said softly. “But I never lied.”

“That’s the same thing.”

“No,” he said. “It isn’t. I wanted to know the world without being bowed to. I wanted to know people who weren’t afraid of me. I wanted to know you.”

Her heart hammered. “Why me?”

“Because you see people,” he said. “Because you live the Torah without reciting it. Because you make me want to be the kind of king my father prays I will become.”

She shook her head. “You should have told me.”

“I know.”

“You should have trusted me.”

“I do.”

She looked away, blinking hard. “I don’t belong in your world.”

He stepped closer, voice low. “Then let me bring my world to yours.”

She frowned. “What does that mean?”

“I want you to meet my family,” he said. “Not as a servant. Not as a curiosity. As someone I... care for.”

Her breath caught.

“And not alone,” he added quickly. “Your mother. Your brothers. Anyone you wish. They are welcome.”

She stared at him, stunned.

He wasn't asking her to step into the palace alone.  
He wasn't asking her to leave her world behind.  
He was asking her to bring her world with her.

“Why?” she whispered.

“Because I want them to see what I see,” he said. “And because I want you to know I'm not ashamed of you.”

Her throat tightened.

He held out his hand — not commanding, not assuming, simply offering.

“Come,” he said. “Let me honor you.”

She didn't take his hand.

Not yet.

But she didn't walk away.

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## **That night — Shulamit with her mother**

Her mother listened in silence as Shulamit told her everything — the revelation, the invitation, the fear, the confusion.

When she finished, her mother took her hands.

“Child,” she said softly, “a prince who hides his title to learn the truth of a woman's heart is a rare man.”

Shulamit swallowed. “I don't know if I can trust him.”

“Then go,” her mother said, “and find out.”

Shulamit looked up sharply. “You think I should go?”

“I think,” her mother said, “that courage is not the absence of fear. It is walking into a room where you do not belong — and discovering that you do.”

Shulamit closed her eyes.

Her mother squeezed her hands. “And if he honors you in front of his family, then you will know the truth of him.”

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## **The next morning**

Shulamit met Solomon at the edge of the vineyard.

“I will come,” she said quietly. “But my mother comes too.”

Solomon bowed his head. “As she should.”

“And my brothers.”

“Of course.”

“And if your family dishonors me—”

“They won’t,” he said. “Not while I breathe.”

She studied him for a long moment.

Then she nodded.

And the story moved toward the banquet.

## Chapter 4 — The Banquet of Testing

Shulamit had never seen a building so large.

The palace rose above Jerusalem like a mountain of cedar and stone, its walls catching the late-afternoon light, its courtyards echoing with the footsteps of servants and soldiers. She stood just inside the gate, hands clasped tightly in front of her, trying not to stare.

Solomon walked beside her, but not too close. He had shed the simple tunic he wore in the vineyards. Now he wore garments of deep blue, embroidered with gold thread. He looked taller, somehow. Older. More like the prince he was.

She felt suddenly small.

“Are you well?” he asked softly.

She nodded, though her stomach was twisting. “I shouldn’t be here.”

“You should,” he said. “You belong here.”

She almost laughed. “I belong in the vineyards.”

He stopped walking. “You belong where you choose to stand.”

She looked away. “Your family won’t see it that way.”

He didn’t answer.

That frightened her more than anything.

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The women’s hall was already full when she entered. Servants moved between the tables, setting out platters of roasted lamb, bowls of figs, baskets of bread. The wives and daughters of David sat in clusters, their garments shimmering like jewels, their hair braided with ribbons and gold.

Conversation stopped when Shulamit stepped inside.

She felt the weight of their eyes — assessing, measuring, dismissing.

Her skin, darkened by the sun.

Her hands, calloused from work.

Her dress, plain and unadorned.

Her posture, too upright for a servant, too humble for a noblewoman.

She wanted to turn and run.

A servant guided her to a seat near the head of the women's table. She sat stiffly, unsure where to place her hands. The women around her whispered behind their veils.

"Too dark."

"Too common."

"Look at her hands."

"Where did he find her?"

Shulamit stared at the table, cheeks burning.

Across the hall, she saw Solomon take his seat among the men. He looked for her immediately. Their eyes met. For a moment, the noise of the hall faded.

Then Michal — Saul's daughter — leaned toward Shulamit.

"So," she said, her voice smooth as polished stone, "you are the girl from the vineyards."

Shulamit swallowed. "Yes."

Michal's smile did not reach her eyes. "How... rustic."

A few women laughed softly.

Shulamit felt her throat tighten.

Bathsheba leaned in next, her gaze sharp and calculating. "Tell me, child — do you know anything of court life? Of alliances? Of the responsibilities of a prince's household?"

Shulamit opened her mouth, but no words came.

Bathsheba's smile was thin. "I thought not."

The whispers grew louder.

Shulamit's heart pounded. She felt trapped, foolish, exposed. She wondered if Solomon had brought her here as a test. She wondered if she had misunderstood everything. She wondered if she had been a fool to trust him.

She lowered her eyes.

Then a quiet voice spoke from her left.

"Leave her be."

The room fell silent.

Abigail — David’s wise, gentle, formidable wife — set down her cup and turned her gaze on the other women. Her eyes were calm, but there was steel beneath the calm.

“You judge her skin,” Abigail said, “but the sun has darkened her because she works. You judge her hands, but they feed the poor. You judge her clothes, but they are clean and honest.”

Michal stiffened. “We are only—”

“You are only afraid,” Abigail said softly. “Afraid that a woman of the land might remind us what a kingdom is for.”

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The hall quieted as David entered.

He walked slowly now, age bending him slightly, but his presence still filled the room. The men rose. The women bowed their heads. Shulamit followed their lead, though her heart was pounding so loudly she wondered if anyone could hear it.

David took his seat at the head of the men’s table. Solomon sat at his right hand.

Shulamit’s breath caught.

He looked different here — not the young man who tied vines beside her, not the wanderer who asked questions with hungry eyes. Here he was the prince, the heir, the one the prophets whispered about. His posture was straight, his expression composed, his garments rich with gold thread.

He looked like someone she could never touch.

He looked up, searching the women’s table until he found her.

Their eyes met.

For a heartbeat, the hall fell away.

Then the meal began.

---

The men’s table buzzed with conversation — commanders discussing border skirmishes, advisors murmuring about treaties, David’s older sons boasting about their exploits. Solomon listened politely, but his gaze kept drifting toward the women’s table.

Adonijah noticed first.

He leaned toward Solomon with a smirk. “Your eyes wander, brother.”

Solomon stiffened. “Do they?”

“Oh yes,” Adonijah said, following his gaze. “Ah. The vineyard girl.”

Solomon’s jaw tightened. “Her name is Shulamit.”

“Pretty,” Adonijah said. “In a rustic sort of way.”

Solomon’s hand curled into a fist under the table.

Another brother — Chileab — leaned in. “Is Father aware you’ve brought a commoner to the royal table?”

“She is my guest,” Solomon said evenly.

“A guest,” Adonijah repeated, amused. “Is that what we’re calling it?”

Solomon forced himself to breathe. “Say what you mean.”

Adonijah shrugged. “Only that a prince should choose wisely. Beauty is plentiful. Alliances are rare.”

Solomon’s voice was quiet, but it carried. “Wisdom is rarer still.”

A few men glanced at him, surprised by the steel in his tone.

David looked up from his plate, studying his son with a thoughtful expression.

---

Shulamit sat rigidly, hands folded in her lap. The women around her whispered behind their veils.

“She doesn’t know how to sit properly.”

“Look at her posture.”

“Her dress is plain.”

“Her skin is so dark.”

“Does she even know how to read?”

“Why would Solomon choose *her*?”

Shulamit stared at her plate, cheeks burning.

She felt like a weed in a garden of lilies.

Michal leaned closer, voice dripping with disdain. “Tell me, vineyard girl — do you know how to play the lyre? Or recite poetry? Or speak to foreign envoys?”

Shulamit swallowed. “No.”

Michal smiled triumphantly. “I thought not.”

Bathsheba’s voice followed, smooth and sharp. “A prince’s wife must be more than a pretty face. She must understand politics. Strategy. Influence. Do you?”

Shulamit’s throat tightened. “I... I know the land.”

Bathsheba’s smile thinned. “The land does not rule a kingdom.”

Shulamit felt her vision blur. She blinked hard, refusing to cry.

Across the hall, Solomon saw her distress. His face tightened with helpless anger.

---

Abigail set down her cup with a soft clink.

The sound was gentle, but the room stilled.

She turned to Bathsheba first. “You speak of politics,” she said quietly, “but politics without righteousness is merely ambition.”

Bathsheba’s eyes narrowed. “I meant no offense.”

“You meant to test her,” Abigail said. “And she has passed.”

A murmur rippled through the women.

Abigail turned to Michal. “And you — you judge her skin. But the sun has darkened her because she works. You judge her hands. But they feed the poor. You judge her clothes. But they are clean and honest.”

Michal’s face flushed with anger.

Abigail rose to her feet.

Her voice was soft, but it carried through the hall like a blade wrapped in silk.

“Do not despise the woman who knows the land,” she said. “For the land is the heart of the kingdom. And a king who loves such a woman will rule a kingdom that loves him back.”

The hall fell silent.

Even David looked moved.

Abigail turned to Shulamit and lifted her hand — the calloused, sun-browned hand — and kissed it gently.

“This,” she said, “is the hand of a queen.”

---

Solomon stood.

The men fell silent. The women turned. Even David looked up, eyebrows raised.

Solomon stepped away from the men’s table and crossed the hall — not quickly, not dramatically, but with the steady, deliberate steps of a man who has made a decision.

He stopped beside Shulamit.

Every eye in the hall was on them.

He bowed his head to her — not deeply, but unmistakably.

“Shulamit,” he said, his voice clear, “you honor this house with your presence.”

A gasp rippled through the women.

He extended his hand.

Not commanding.

Not assuming.

Inviting.

Shulamit stared at him, heart pounding.

She saw the sincerity in his eyes.

She saw the fear — not of her, but for her.

She saw the choice he was making.

She saw the risk he was taking.

She saw the love he was offering.

Slowly, she placed her hand in his.

The hall exhaled.

Solomon lifted her hand to his lips — a gesture of respect, not possession — and said softly, but loud enough for all to hear:

“My banner over you is honor.”

Shulamit felt something inside her break open — the fear, the shame, the doubt — all dissolving like mist in sunlight.

She looked at him and knew.

*His banner over me is love.*

Not the love of poetry.  
Not the love of desire.  
Not the love of possession.

The love of a man choosing her in front of the world.

The love of a future king choosing justice over politics.  
The love of a prince choosing truth over alliances.  
The love of Solomon choosing Shulamit.

And she chose him back.

Not with words.

But with the quiet, steady way she lifted her chin and met the eyes of every woman in the hall.

She was no longer afraid.

She was seen.  
She was honored.  
She was loved.

And the kingdom would remember this night.

## Chapter 5 — The Springtime Call

The next morning dawned cool and pale, the sky washed clean by a night wind. Shulamit woke before the household stirred. Her mother slept lightly in the next room; her brothers snored like oxen behind the curtain. Shulamit slipped outside, needing air, needing space, needing to understand what had happened the night before.

The palace still shimmered in her mind — the whispers, the stares, the weight of judgment. But stronger than all of it was the memory of Solomon crossing the hall, of his hand extended, of his voice steady and clear:

*“My banner over you is honor.”*

She pressed a hand to her chest, as if the words were still there, warm against her skin.

She didn’t know what it meant. Not fully. Not yet. But she knew it had changed something inside her.

She walked toward the vineyards, the earth cool beneath her feet. The vines were still in shadow, their leaves trembling in the early breeze. She breathed deeply, letting the familiar scents steady her.

A figure stood at the edge of the terraces.

Her heart stumbled.

Solomon.

He wore no royal cloak today, no embroidered tunic. Just a simple garment, like the one he had worn the first day she met him. His hair was unbound, stirred by the wind. He looked younger like this. Softer. More himself.

He turned when he heard her footsteps.

“I hoped you would come,” he said.

She stopped a few paces away. “You shouldn’t be here.”

“Probably not.”

“Your family—”

“Will survive without me for an hour.”

She looked down at her hands. “I don’t know what to say to you.”

“Then don’t say anything,” he said gently. “Walk with me.”

She hesitated.

He waited.

Finally, she nodded.

They walked along the lower terraces, the sun slowly rising behind them. Birds stirred in the fig trees. A shepherd’s flute drifted faintly from the hills. The world felt new, as if the night had washed it clean.

Solomon spoke first.

“I’m sorry,” he said quietly. “For the way they treated you.”

Shulamit shook her head. “It wasn’t your fault.”

“It was,” he said. “Because I brought you there. Because I didn’t prepare them. Because I didn’t protect you.”

She stopped walking. “You did protect me.”

He turned to her, confused.

“You stood up,” she said. “In front of everyone. You chose me. You didn’t have to.”

He swallowed. “I wanted to.”

She looked away, the memory still too bright. “I don’t understand you.”

He smiled faintly. “I don’t always understand myself.”

She laughed — a small, surprised sound. It loosened something between them.

They walked again, slower now.

After a while, Solomon said, “When I was a boy, my father used to take me into the hills in spring. He said the world teaches better than tutors. He said the land speaks if you listen.”

Shulamit nodded. “Your father is right.”

Solomon glanced at her. “Yesterday, in the hall... I felt like I couldn’t breathe. Like the walls were closing in. But here—” He gestured to the terraces, the hills, the sky. “Here I can breathe again.”

Shulamit looked at him, really looked at him — the prince who hid his title to learn the truth of people, the young man who tied vines with clumsy hands, the heir who bowed to her in front of the kingdom.

“You’re different out here,” she said softly.

“So are you.”

She felt heat rise to her cheeks. “How?”

“In the palace,” he said, “you were afraid. But here... you’re strong. Steady. You belong to the land.”

She nodded. “And you don’t.”

“No,” he said. “But I want to.”

They reached a rise overlooking the valley. The sun broke over the ridge, flooding the terraces with gold. The vines glowed. The air warmed. The world felt alive.

Solomon turned to her, his voice barely above a whisper.

“Shulamit... come away with me.”

She froze.

He stepped closer, not touching her, but close enough that she could feel the warmth of him.

“Not far,” he said. “Just into the hills. Just for a morning. I want to show you the places I used to walk as a boy. I want to see the world with you.”

Her heart pounded.

She thought of the palace, the whispers, the judgment.

She thought of her mother’s words: *Courage is not the absence of fear.*

She thought of Solomon’s hand extended in the hall.

She thought of the way he looked at her now — not as a prince, not as a ruler, but as a man asking for her company.

She took a breath.

“Solomon,” she said, “I don’t know what this is.”

He nodded. “Neither do I.”

“But I know what it could cost.”

“So do I.”

She looked at him — really looked — and saw the truth in his eyes.

He wasn't asking her to be a queen.  
He wasn't asking her to be a symbol.  
He wasn't asking her to be anything but herself.

She exhaled slowly.

“Then yes,” she said. “I'll walk with you.”

His smile was small, but it lit his whole face.

They stepped into the hills together, the morning bright around them, the world opening like a blossom in spring.

And though neither of them said it aloud, the Song's ancient words hovered in the air between them:

*“Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.”*

---

They climbed the first rise in silence, the morning light warming the stones beneath their feet. The hills opened before them — terraced vineyards, scattered olive trees, patches of wild thyme and sage. The air smelled of earth and green things waking.

Solomon paused at the crest, looking out over the valley.

“When I was a boy,” he said, “my father brought me here after he took the city. He wanted me to see the land we had won.”

Shulamit followed his gaze. “Won?”

He nodded. “The Jebusites held these hills. My father's men fought for every terrace. I remember the sound of bronze armor clashing. The shouting. The dust. I was too young to fight, but old enough to understand what it meant.”

Shulamit looked at the same slope and saw something entirely different.

“I see thyme,” she said softly.

He blinked. “Thyme?”

She knelt and brushed her fingers over a patch of low green leaves. “For cooking. For healing. My mother used to make a tea with it when my brothers were sick.”

Solomon crouched beside her, watching her hands. “I never noticed it.”

“You weren’t looking for it.”

He smiled faintly. “No. I suppose I wasn’t.”

They walked on.

---

They passed a rocky outcrop where a shepherd boy stood watch over a small flock. He couldn’t have been more than ten. A sling hung from his belt, and he practiced throwing stones at a distant stump, each shot more accurate than the last.

Shulamit waved to him. The boy grinned and waved back.

Solomon watched him with a strange expression. “My father was like that once,” he murmured. “A shepherd with a sling.”

Shulamit nodded. “Most great men begin small.”

He looked at her, surprised by the simplicity of the truth.

---

Farther along, they came upon a small hovel built into the hillside — barely more than a lean-to of mud brick and woven branches. Smoke curled from a tiny chimney. A widow lived there, Shulamit explained — a woman who had lost her husband to fever and her sons to conscription.

Solomon’s face tightened. “I didn’t know.”

“How could you?” Shulamit said gently. “You’ve never walked these hills.”

He stepped closer to the hovel, studying it with a heaviness in his chest. “She lives like this?”

“She survives,” Shulamit said. “The neighbors bring her bread. I bring her grapes when I can.”

Solomon swallowed. “A king should know these things.”

“You’re not king yet.”

“No,” he said. “But I will be.”

She watched him, seeing the weight settle on him — not the weight of power, but the weight of responsibility.

“You can learn,” she said quietly.

He looked at her, and something in his eyes softened. “You’re teaching me.”

---

They walked again, the path narrowing as it wound between boulders. Wildflowers dotted the hillside — red anemones, pale cyclamen, tiny yellow blossoms that clung to the cracks in the stone.

Shulamit stopped to gather a few sprigs of mint growing near a trickle of water. “For my mother,” she said. “She’ll make tea.”

Solomon watched her with a kind of wonder. “You see everything.”

“You see battles,” she said. “I see what grows after them.”

He exhaled slowly. “Maybe that’s why I need you.”

She froze.

He hadn’t meant to say it aloud. His eyes widened slightly, as if he wished he could pull the words back.

But he didn’t.

He let them stand between them, fragile and true.

Shulamit looked away, heart pounding. “Solomon... you don’t know what you’re saying.”

“I do,” he said. “For the first time in my life, I do.”

She shook her head. “You’re a prince. I’m—”

“You’re Shulamit,” he said. “The woman who sees the land as it is. The woman who knows the poor by name. The woman who ties vines with steady hands. The woman who stood in a hall full of nobles and did not break.”

She swallowed hard. “I almost did.”

“But you didn’t,” he said. “And I saw it. I saw your courage. I saw your dignity. I saw your strength.”

She closed her eyes.

The wind stirred the thyme. The shepherd boy's laughter echoed faintly. The widow's chimney sent up a thin ribbon of smoke. The world felt impossibly alive.

Solomon stepped closer, not touching her, but close enough that she could feel the warmth of him.

"Shulamit," he said softly, "when I look at these hills, I see my father's victories. But when I walk them with you... I see the kingdom I want to build."

She opened her eyes.

He held her gaze, steady and unafraid.

"A kingdom where widows are fed," he said. "Where shepherd boys grow into men without fear. Where the land is tended, not taken. Where justice is not a word on a scroll but a way of life."

Her breath caught.

"That," he said, "is the kingdom I want. And you... you are the one who showed it to me."

She felt something inside her shift — a slow, deep turning, like a seed breaking open underground.

She didn't speak.

She didn't need to.

The hills spoke for her — the wind in the thyme, the bleating of sheep, the distant call of a shepherd, the warmth of the rising sun.

Solomon reached out, very gently, and brushed a leaf from her sleeve.

"Come away with me," he whispered again.

This time, she didn't hesitate.

She nodded.

And the world felt like spring.

## Chapter 6 — The Night of Fear

Shulamit could not sleep.

The house was quiet — her mother breathing softly behind the curtain, her brothers snoring in their room — but her mind churned like a storm. She lay on her mat staring at the ceiling, replaying the day in fragments.

Solomon's smile in the morning light.  
His voice in the hills.  
The way he said her name.  
The way he looked at her as if she were the only person in the world.

She pressed a hand to her chest, feeling her heartbeat thudding against her ribs.

She was falling in love.

The realization struck her with both sweetness and terror. She had known affection before, admiration, even the beginnings of desire — but nothing like this. Nothing that made her feel unsteady, as if the ground beneath her feet had shifted.

She turned onto her side, pulling the blanket around her shoulders.

*This is foolish, she told herself. He is a prince. You are a vineyard girl. You do not belong in his world.*

But another voice — quieter, deeper — whispered back:

*He chose you.*

She closed her eyes, trying to steady her breathing.

She remembered the banquet — the whispers, the stares, the humiliation. She remembered Abigail's hand lifting hers, Solomon crossing the hall, the warmth in his eyes. She remembered the walk through the hills, the way he spoke of justice, the way he listened to her, the way he saw the world differently because of her.

She remembered the moment he said, *"Maybe that's why I need you."*

Her heart tightened.

Need was dangerous.  
Need meant attachment.  
Attachment meant loss.

She sat up abruptly, unable to lie still any longer. The room felt too small, too close. She slipped outside into the cool night air, wrapping her shawl around her shoulders.

The moon hung low over the hills, silvering the terraces. The vines rustled softly in the breeze. The world felt vast and empty.

She walked toward the vineyard, her feet moving without thought.

---

She reached the lower terraces and stopped, staring at the rows of vines. In the moonlight they looked like shadows — familiar, yet strange. She had walked these paths her whole life, but tonight they felt different.

Tonight they felt like the edge of something she could not name.

She sank onto a low stone wall, burying her face in her hands.

“What am I doing?” she whispered.

She had let him into her world.

She had let him into her heart.

She had let herself believe — even for a moment — that she could belong in his.

A sudden fear gripped her.

*What if he changes his mind?*

*What if his family forbids it?*

*What if he marries someone else — someone noble, someone suitable?*

*What if she is only a passing fancy, a story he will forget when he becomes king?*

Her breath came fast and shallow.

She had seen it happen before — men who promised love and gave nothing, men who spoke sweetly and vanished, men who took what they wanted and left ruin behind.

Solomon was not like them.

But he was still a man.

And a prince.

And the future king.

She pressed her palms against her eyes, fighting tears.

“I’m a fool,” she whispered. “A fool to think this could last.”

A sound behind her made her jump.

She turned.

Solomon stood at the edge of the terrace, breathing hard as if he had run.

“Shulamit,” he said, relief flooding his voice. “I couldn’t find you.”

She stared at him, stunned. “Why are you here?”

“I went to your house,” he said. “Your mother said you had gone out. I thought—” He broke off, shaking his head. “I thought something had happened.”

She swallowed. “Nothing happened.”

“You’re crying.”

She wiped her cheeks quickly. “It’s nothing.”

“It’s not nothing,” he said, stepping closer. “Tell me.”

She shook her head. “I can’t.”

“Shulamit—”

“You don’t understand,” she said, her voice breaking. “You don’t understand what this is for me. What it costs. What it risks.”

He froze.

She took a shaky breath. “You are a prince. You have a future laid out for you. You have a kingdom waiting. I am... I am just me.”

He stepped closer, slowly, as if approaching a frightened animal.

“You are not ‘just’ anything,” he said softly. “You are the woman who changed how I see the world.”

She looked away. “That’s not enough.”

“It is for me.”

“It won’t be for your family. Or your advisors. Or your people.”

He hesitated — and she saw the truth in his silence.

She turned away, wrapping her arms around herself. “I can’t do this,” she whispered. “I can’t lose myself in something that might break me.”

He stood behind her, close but not touching.

“Shulamit,” he said quietly, “I can’t promise you the future. I can’t promise you the throne. I can’t promise you that the path ahead will be easy.”

She closed her eyes, tears slipping down her cheeks.

“But I can promise you this,” he said. “I will not walk away. Not from you. Not from what we are building. Not from the woman who has already shaped my heart.”

She turned slowly.

He met her gaze, steady and unafraid.

“You are not alone,” he said. “Not tonight. Not ever.”

Something inside her cracked open — not with fear this time, but with a fierce, trembling hope.

She stepped toward him.

He opened his arms.

She let herself be held.

And in the quiet of the night, beneath the moonlit vines, she felt the truth settle over her like a cloak:

*His banner over me is love.*

Not the love of a banquet hall.

Not the love of public declaration.

Not the love of poetry.

The love of a man who came searching for her in the dark.

The love of a prince who ran through the night because she was missing.

The love of Solomon.

And for the first time, she let herself believe it.

Shulamit let herself be held.

Solomon's arms were warm around her, steady, grounding. The night wind rustled the vines. Somewhere in the distance, a night bird called. Slowly, her breathing steadied. Slowly, the trembling in her hands eased.

When he walked her back to her house, he didn't speak. He didn't need to. He simply stayed beside her, a quiet presence in the moonlight.

At her door, he touched her hand — just once — and said, "Rest."

She nodded, though she doubted she could.

But exhaustion claimed her the moment she lay down.

And she dreamed.

---

She was standing in the vineyard, but it was not the vineyard she knew. The rows were too long, stretching into darkness. The terraces were too steep, the shadows too deep. The moon hung low and red, casting strange light across the leaves.

"Solomon?" she called.

Her voice echoed back to her, thin and uncertain.

She walked between the vines, her bare feet brushing the cool earth. The air felt heavy, as if the night itself were holding its breath.

"Solomon!"

No answer.

Panic tightened in her chest.

She began to run.

The vines seemed to shift around her, closing in, twisting, narrowing the path. She pushed through them, branches catching her sleeves, leaves brushing her face. Her heart pounded.

She reached the upper terrace — but it was empty.

She reached the fig tree — but it was withered.

She reached the shepherd's hill — but the boy was gone, the flock scattered.

“Where are you?” she cried.

Her voice cracked.

She stumbled toward the widow’s hovel, but when she reached it, the door hung open, swinging in the wind. The hearth was cold. The house was empty.

Fear clawed at her throat.

She turned in circles, searching the hills, searching the shadows, searching the silence.

“Solomon!”

Her voice broke.

She ran again, breath ragged, feet bleeding on the stones. The hills blurred. The terraces twisted. The world felt like a maze she could not escape.

Then — a sound.

Footsteps.

She froze.

“Shulamit.”

His voice.

She spun toward it, but the shadows shifted, and she couldn’t see him.

“Where are you?” she whispered.

“Here.”

She ran toward the voice, pushing through the vines, stumbling over stones, reaching, reaching—

And then she saw him.

Standing on the ridge, bathed in moonlight, his face calm, his eyes steady.

Relief crashed over her like a wave.

She ran to him.

He opened his arms.

She fell into them, breathless, shaking.

“I thought I lost you,” she whispered.

“You didn’t,” he said. “You won’t.”

She clung to him, her heart pounding against his chest.

He lifted her chin gently.

“Shulamit,” he said, “I am yours. Do not fear.”

The words wrapped around her like a cloak.

The moon brightened.

The vines straightened.

The hills softened.

The world steadied.

And she woke.

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## **Waking**

Her breath came fast, her heart racing.

The room was dark, quiet, familiar.

Her mother slept nearby.

Her brothers snored.

The night wind whispered through the shutters.

She pressed a hand to her chest.

It was only a dream.

But the fear had been real.

The searching had been real.

The relief had been real.

And the truth beneath it was real:

She loved him.

Deeply.  
Dangerously.  
Irrevocably.

She lay back down, staring at the ceiling, letting the dream settle into her bones.

She had feared losing him.  
She had feared being abandoned.  
She had feared being unworthy.

But the dream had shown her something else too:

She would search for him.  
She would fight for him.  
She would not let fear rule her.

She closed her eyes.

And for the first time that night, she slept without trembling.

## Chapter 7 — A Royal Procession

The next morning dawned bright and sharp, the kind of morning that made the hills glow and the air hum with life. Shulamit woke with the remnants of her dream still clinging to her—fear, searching, relief. She lay still for a moment, letting the quiet of the house settle around her.

Her mother was already up, kneading dough in the small courtyard. The smell of yeast and warm flour drifted through the doorway.

“You slept late,” her mother said without looking up.

Shulamit rubbed her eyes. “I didn’t sleep well.”

Her mother’s hands paused. “Dreams?”

Shulamit nodded.

Her mother didn’t press. She simply shaped the dough with steady hands, as if the world could be held together by bread.

Shulamit stepped outside to fetch water from the cistern.

That was when she heard it.

A distant rumble.

A rhythmic pounding.

The unmistakable sound of hooves.

She froze.

Her mother looked up sharply. “What is that?”

Shulamit’s heart began to race. “I don’t know.”

They walked to the edge of the courtyard. Her brothers emerged from the house, wiping sleep from their eyes.

The sound grew louder.

Then—over the ridge—came the first glint of sunlight on bronze.

A column of riders crested the hill, their armor gleaming, their banners snapping in the wind. Soldiers in formation. Trumpets sounding. The royal crest of David flying high.

A royal procession.

Headed straight toward the village.

Shulamit's breath caught.

Her brothers swore under their breath. Her mother pressed a hand to her chest.

“What is happening?” one brother whispered.

Shulamit knew.

Before she saw him, she knew.

Solomon rode at the front.

Not in simple clothes.

Not as the wanderer who tied vines beside her.

Not as the young man who held her in the night.

He rode as the prince.

His armor was polished, his cloak embroidered with gold thread, his posture straight and regal. The people of the village began to gather, murmuring, bowing, stepping back to make way.

Shulamit felt the world tilt.

He looked like someone she could never touch.

He looked like someone who belonged to history, not to her.

Her mother touched her arm. “Child...”

But Shulamit couldn't move.

The procession slowed as it entered the village. Solomon dismounted, handing his reins to a soldier. He scanned the crowd, searching.

His eyes found her.

And everything else fell away.

He walked toward her—not quickly, not dramatically, but with the steady, deliberate steps of a man who knows exactly what he is doing.

The villagers parted for him.

Shulamit stood rooted to the spot, her heart pounding.

When he reached her, he bowed his head—not deeply, but unmistakably.

“Shulamit,” he said, his voice warm despite the armor, “I came to see you.”

She stared at him, stunned. “Why... like this?”

He glanced at the soldiers behind him. “Because I cannot always come alone. Not anymore.”

Her throat tightened. “Your father sent for you?”

He nodded. “There are matters I must attend to. Matters of the kingdom.”

She swallowed. “And you came here first.”

“Yes,” he said simply. “I wanted you to see me as I am. Not only the man who walks the hills with you. But the man who must one day lead Israel.”

She looked at the armor, the banners, the soldiers, the crest of David shining in the sun.

It was overwhelming.

It was terrifying.

It was real.

“Solomon...” she whispered. “I don’t know if I can do this.”

He stepped closer, lowering his voice. “You don’t have to decide today.”

She shook her head. “It’s not that simple.”

“I know.”

He reached out, very gently, and touched her hand.

Not claiming.

Not demanding.

Just anchoring.

“I will come back,” he said. “As often as I can. In whatever way I can. I will not disappear.”

She looked up at him, searching his face.

He held her gaze, steady and unafraid.

“I meant what I said,” he murmured. “You are not alone.”

Her breath trembled.

The villagers watched in stunned silence. Her brothers exchanged wide-eyed glances. Her mother's expression softened with something like awe.

Shulamit felt the fear still there—sharp, real, undeniable.

But beneath it, something else stirred.

The memory of his arms around her.  
The dream of searching and finding.  
The truth of his voice in the night.  
The banner he lifted over her in the hall.

She took a slow breath.

“Then go,” she said softly. “Do what you must.”

He nodded.

“But come back,” she added, her voice barely above a whisper.

His smile was small, but it lit his whole face.

“I will.”

He mounted his horse. The soldiers formed around him. The trumpets sounded again.

As the procession turned toward Jerusalem, Shulamit stood in the dust of the road, watching him go.

And though fear still coiled in her chest, she felt something else rising to meet it:

Hope.

Not the fragile hope of a girl dreaming of love.  
The fierce hope of a woman who has seen a man choose her in the light of day.

She pressed a hand to her heart.

*His banner over me is love.*

And she believed it.



## Chapter 8 — The Letters and Intrigue

The royal procession had barely disappeared over the ridge when Shulamit felt the ache of absence settle into her chest. She tried to busy herself with the vines, with the baskets, with the rhythms of the land — but her thoughts kept drifting toward Jerusalem.

Toward him.

Toward the armor and the banners and the weight he carried.

That evening, after her brothers had gone to bed and her mother was mending a tunic by lamplight, Shulamit sat at the small wooden table where her father once studied Torah.

The table still bore the faint knife marks from when he taught her to shape letters.

She lit a small oil lamp.  
She unrolled a scrap of parchment.  
She dipped her reed pen into ink.

Her hand trembled.

She had never written to a prince before.

But she had written to her father.  
And she had written prayers.  
And she had written psalms in the margins of her heart.

So, she wrote.

---

### Shulamit's First Letter

*[Solomon](#),\**

*The hills were quiet today. The shepherd boy practiced with his sling. The widow's chimney smoked. The thyme grew wild along the path. I walked the terraces and thought of how you saw battles where I saw herbs, and how both are true.*

*I do not know how to be the woman who stands beside a prince. But I know how to be the woman who walks the land. If you wish, I will teach you what the land teaches me.*

*Return safely.*

*—Shulamit*

She read it twice, cheeks warm, then folded it quickly before she could lose her courage.

Her mother looked up from her sewing. “A letter?”

Shulamit nodded.

“Then send it,” her mother said. “Words unspoken are seeds that never grow.”

---

## Solomon’s Reply

The messenger returned three days later.

Shulamit’s hands shook as she broke the seal.

*Shulamit,*

*Your letter reached me in the council chamber. I read it while generals argued over borders and advisors debated treaties. Your words were like water in a dry place.*

*You say you do not know how to stand beside a prince. I do not know how to be the prince I must become. But I know this: when I walk the hills with you, I remember the kind of king I want to be.*

*Teach me the land. Teach me the people. Teach me what you see.*

*I will return as soon as I can.*

—*Solomon*

She pressed the letter to her chest.

Her mother watched her with a knowing smile.

---

## The Second Exchange

The next letter came more easily.

*Solomon,*

*The vines are budding. The early figs are forming. The shepherd boy hit the stump three times in a row today. He said he wants to be like your father. I told him he should be like himself.*

*You asked me to teach you what I see. I see that the land remembers kindness. I see that the poor remember justice. I see that the hills are waiting for a king who listens.*

*Come when you can.*

—*Shulamit*

His reply arrived five days later.

*Shulamit,*

*I read your letter under the olive tree where my father used to pray. I think he would have liked you. He would have said you have the heart of a prophet and the hands of a steward.*

*The court is restless. There are whispers about alliances and marriages. They speak as if I am not in the room. But when I read your words, I remember that a kingdom is not built on alliances. It is built on truth.*

*I will come soon.*

—*Solomon*

Shulamit folded the letter slowly.

Her heart ached — not with fear this time, but with longing.

---

## **The Third Exchange (The Turning Letter)**

This one she wrote late at night, unable to sleep.

*Solomon,*

*I dreamed I lost you. I searched the hills and the terraces and the fig trees, calling your name. When I found you, I woke with tears on my face.*

*I do not know what this love will cost. But I know what it is worth.*

*Return soon.*

—*Shulamit*

His reply came faster than any before.

*Shulamit,*

*I dreamed the same dream.*

*I am coming.*

—*Solomon*

She read the letter three times.

Then she pressed it to her lips.

---

The first letter was harmless enough.

A folded scrap of parchment, sealed with a simple knot of twine, delivered by a dusty messenger who bowed too deeply and left too quickly. Solomon slipped it into his sleeve before anyone noticed.

But someone always notices.

---

## **Bathsheba Notices First**

She saw the way Solomon's fingers lingered on the parchment.

She saw the way his eyes softened.

She saw the way he excused himself from the council chamber with unusual haste.

She did not confront him.

Not yet.

She simply watched.

Bathsheba had survived palace life longer than any of David's wives. She knew how to read a man's face. She knew how to read a room. And she knew how to read danger.

A prince in love with a vineyard girl?

Danger.

---

## **Michal Notices Next**

Michal was not subtle.

She saw the second letter delivered in the courtyard and made no effort to hide her disdain.

“A messenger from the vineyards?” she said loudly enough for the servants to hear. “How quaint.”

Solomon ignored her.

That only made her angrier.

Michal had been raised in a palace. She had been a king’s daughter, a king’s wife, a king’s widow. She knew the rules of power. And she knew that a woman like Shulamit — sun-darkened, calloused, unpolished — threatened those rules.

She began to whisper.

Whispers are seeds.

Seeds grow roots.

Roots crack stone.

---

## **Adonijah Notices Third**

Adonijah was not a fool.

He saw the letters.

He saw the way Solomon guarded them.

He saw the way Solomon’s face changed when he read them — softened, steadied, strengthened.

Adonijah did not like it.

He had ambitions of his own.

He had followers.

He had charm.

He had the memory of his father’s favor.

He did not want Solomon to gain the kind of love that makes a man unshakeable.

So he began to sow doubt among the men.

“A prince must marry wisely.”

“A vineyard girl cannot strengthen the throne.”

“Solomon is letting his heart cloud his judgment.”

Men listened.

Men always listen when power is at stake.

---

## David Notices Last

David was old, but not blind.

He saw the letters.

He saw the tension in the court.

He saw the way Bathsheba watched Solomon.

He saw the way Adonijah whispered.

He saw the way Michal sharpened her tongue.

And he saw the way Solomon walked differently now — with a quiet certainty, a groundedness, a steadiness that reminded him of someone.

Himself.

David said nothing.

But he prayed.

---

## The Letter That Changes Everything

It was the fourth letter that broke the quiet.

Shulamit had written it late at night, her heart full of longing and fear and fierce devotion.

*Solomon,*

*The hills are empty without you. The vines feel restless. The shepherd boy asked when you will return. I told him soon. I hope I did not lie.*

*I dreamed again. I searched for you. I found you. I woke with your name on my lips.*

*Come back to me.*

*—Shulamit*

Solomon read it in his chamber, alone.

He pressed it to his lips.

He closed his eyes.

He whispered her name.

And then — because he was tired, because he was distracted, because he was human — he left the letter on his writing table when he went to the council meeting.

A servant found it.

The servant brought it to Bathsheba.

Bathsheba read it.

Slowly.

Carefully.

Twice.

Then she folded it with trembling fingers.

Not with anger.

With fear.

Because she saw something in Shulamit's words that she had not expected:

Strength.

Wisdom.

Depth.

Love that could shape a king.

Bathsheba had wanted a political marriage for her son.

But this?

This was something else.

This was dangerous.

This was destiny.

---

## **The Confrontation**

Bathsheba entered Solomon's chamber without knocking.

He stood when he saw her. "Mother—"

She held up the letter.

His face drained of color.

"Where did you get that?"

"A servant found it."

He closed his eyes. "I meant to hide it."

"You should have burned it."

He looked at her sharply. "I will not burn her words."

Bathsheba's voice softened. "Solomon... you are the heir. You cannot give your heart to a woman who cannot stand beside you."

"She already has."

Bathsheba's breath caught.

Solomon stepped closer, his voice low and steady. "She sees the kingdom more clearly than half the men in this palace. She sees the poor. She sees the land. She sees me."

Bathsheba swallowed. "And what do you see?"

He didn't hesitate.

"My future."

Bathsheba closed her eyes.

When she opened them, there was something new in her gaze — not approval, not acceptance, but the beginning of surrender.

"Then God help us all," she whispered.

---

## The Court Reacts

By nightfall, the palace was buzzing.

“A letter from a vineyard girl.”  
“She writes like a prophet.”  
“She has his heart.”  
“She will ruin him.”  
“She will save him.”  
“She must be stopped.”  
“She must be protected.”

Whispers.  
Rumors.  
Fears.  
Hopes.

The court was a hive, and the letters were honey and poison both.

---

## **And Far Away...**

Shulamit sat at her small wooden table, writing another letter by lamplight.

She had no idea her words had shaken a palace.

She had no idea her ink had become a weapon.

She had no idea her love had become a threat.

She only knew that her heart ached.

And she wrote his name again and again, as if writing it could bring him closer.





## Chapter 9 — The Court Trembles

The palace did not shake all at once.

It trembled the way a tree trembles before a storm — a rustle here, a whisper there, a shift in the air that only the watchful notice.

Bathsheba noticed first.

She sat alone in her chamber, the fourth letter open on her lap. The parchment was simple, the handwriting steady, the words unadorned. She read them once. Then again. Then a third time, slower, as if the ink itself carried weight.

*The hills are empty without you... I dreamed again... Come back to me.*

Bathsheba closed her eyes.

She had expected foolishness. She had expected girlish longing. She had expected the kind of naïve devotion that fades with distance.

She had not expected this.

Strength.

Wisdom.

Depth.

Love that could shape a king.

She folded the letter with trembling fingers.

Not with anger.

With fear.

Because she knew what such love could do — to a man, to a kingdom, to a future.

And she knew her son.

Solomon did not love lightly.

She rose from her seat and paced the length of her chamber, the letter still in her hand. She had survived palace life longer than any of David's wives. She had seen alliances rise and fall, sons turn against fathers, brothers turn against brothers. She had learned to read danger in the smallest shift of a man's face.

And this — this was danger.

Not because the girl was unworthy.

But because she was worthy in ways the court would never understand.

Bathsheba pressed the letter to her chest and whispered a prayer she had not prayed in years.

“God of my son... guard him.”

---

Michal noticed next.

She saw the messenger arrive in the courtyard, dusty and breathless. She saw the way Solomon’s hand closed around the parchment. She saw the way he slipped away, too quickly, too quietly.

She followed.

Not closely — she was not a fool — but close enough to see him disappear into his chamber and close the door behind him.

Close enough to hear the faint sound of a man exhaling as if he had been holding his breath for days.

Close enough to know exactly what it meant.

She smiled — a thin, sharp smile.

“A vineyard girl,” she murmured. “How quaint.”

She turned to the nearest servant, her voice loud enough to carry.

“Tell me — do the vineyards send their daughters to the palace now? Or is this a new kind of tribute?”

The servant bowed his head, unsure whether to answer.

Michal didn’t wait.

She walked away, her smile growing colder.

Whispers were seeds.

Seeds grew roots.

Roots cracked stone.

And Michal had always been very good at planting.

---

Adonijah noticed third.

He saw the change in Solomon — the steadiness, the quiet confidence, the way he walked as if anchored by something unseen. He saw the way Solomon guarded the letters, the way he slipped them into his sleeve, the way his eyes softened when he thought no one was watching.

Adonijah did not like it.

He had ambitions of his own.

He had followers.

He had charm.

He had the memory of his father's favor.

He did not want Solomon to gain the kind of love that makes a man unshakeable.

So he began to sow doubt among the men.

“A prince must marry wisely,” he said.

“A vineyard girl cannot strengthen the throne.”

“Solomon is letting his heart cloud his judgment.”

Men listened.

Men always listened when power was at stake.

---

David noticed last.

He was old, but not blind.

He saw the tension in the court.

He saw the way Bathsheba watched Solomon.

He saw the way Adonijah whispered.

He saw the way Michal sharpened her tongue.

He saw the way the advisors shifted in their seats when Solomon entered the room.

And he saw the way Solomon walked differently now — with a quiet certainty, a groundedness, a steadiness that reminded him of someone.

Himself.

David said nothing.

But he prayed.

---

Solomon felt the shift long before anyone spoke to him.

He felt it in the council chamber, where advisors spoke more loudly than usual, as if trying to drown out something they could not name.

He felt it in the courtyard, where servants bowed too deeply or not at all.

He felt it in the hallways, where whispers followed him like shadows.

He felt it in his mother's eyes, full of questions she had not yet asked.

He felt it in Adonijah's smile — too warm, too sharp.

He felt it in Michal's laughter — brittle as glass.

He felt it in the weight of the letters tucked against his chest.

He felt it most of all in the ache that grew each day he was kept from the hills.

He longed for her.

Not with the longing of a boy, but with the longing of a man who had found the one person who made him see the world clearly.

He read her latest letter in the quiet of his chamber, the words softening the edges of his fear.

*The vines are restless. The shepherd boy asked when you will return. I told him soon. I hope I did not lie.*

He closed his eyes.

He whispered her name.

And he knew what he had to do.

---

Far away in the vineyards, Shulamit sat at her small wooden table, writing another letter by lamplight.

She had no idea her words had shaken a palace.

She had no idea her ink had become a weapon.

She had no idea her love had become a threat.

She only knew that her heart ached.

And she wrote his name again and again, as if writing it could bring him closer.

# Chapter 10 — The Return to the Hills

Solomon left the palace before dawn.

Not in disguise this time.

Not slipping through shadows.

Not as a boy escaping tutors or a prince avoiding advisors.

He left as a man who had made a decision.

The guards at the gate stiffened when they saw him approach in simple clothes, no escort, no announcement. One opened his mouth to protest, but Solomon raised a hand — not harshly, but with a quiet authority that brooked no argument.

“I will return before nightfall,” he said.

The guard bowed.

Solomon stepped into the morning.

The city was still half-asleep. Bakers were lighting their ovens. A potter swept dust from his doorway. A shepherd urged his flock toward the hills. No one bowed. No one whispered. No one measured him against David.

He breathed easier.

But the ache in his chest did not ease.

He walked quickly, the road rising beneath his feet, the air growing cleaner with each step. The hills opened before him — terraced, green, familiar. He had walked this path many times, but never with such urgency. Never with such longing.

Never with such fear.

He reached the bend in the road where he had first seen her.

She was there.

Shulamit stood on the middle terrace, tying a vine to a trellis. Her hair was pulled back, her sleeves rolled, her movements steady. She worked as she always worked — with purpose, with gentleness, with the quiet authority of someone who belonged to the land.

She did not see him at first.

He stopped, breath catching in his throat.

For a moment, he simply watched her.

The world felt right again.

Then she looked up.

Her hands stilled.

“Solomon?”

Her voice was soft, disbelieving.

He swallowed. “I had to see you.”

She climbed down the terrace steps, her brow furrowed. “What happened?”

He opened his mouth — and the weight of the past days pressed against him like a stone.

He looked tired.

Not physically — though there were shadows beneath his eyes — but in a deeper way, as if something inside him had been stretched thin.

Shulamit stepped closer. “Tell me.”

He exhaled shakily. “The letters.”

Her breath caught. “They found them?”

“One of them.”

“Which one?”

“The fourth.”

She closed her eyes.

He reached for her hand — not to claim, not to steady himself, but because he needed the truth of her touch.

“Shulamit,” he said quietly, “your words... they shook the palace.”

She opened her eyes.

“What do you mean?”

He hesitated — not because he doubted her strength, but because he hated the thought of burdening her.

“Bathsheba fears for me,” he said. “Michal mocks you. Adonijah whispers to the elders. The advisors speak of alliances and treaties. They say a prince must marry wisely.”

Shulamit’s jaw tightened. “And they think I am unwise.”

“They think you are dangerous.”

She blinked. “Dangerous?”

He nodded. “Because you see the kingdom clearly. Because you speak truth without fear. Because your words steady me in ways they cannot.”

She looked away, her throat tightening.

He stepped closer. “Shulamit... they fear the man I am becoming.”

She met his gaze. “And who are you becoming?”

He didn’t hesitate.

“The man I want to be.”

Her breath trembled.

He looked out over the terraces — the vines, the fig trees, the shepherd’s hill, the widow’s hovel. The world she had shown him. The world that had changed him.

“Walk with me,” he said.

She nodded.

They climbed the familiar path into the hills. The morning light warmed the stones beneath their feet. Birds stirred in the fig trees. The world felt alive, but different now — heavier, sharper, more fragile.

When they reached the rise overlooking the valley, Solomon stopped.

“I don’t know how to do this,” he said quietly. “I don’t know how to be the prince they expect and the man I am with you.”

Shulamit looked at him — really looked — and saw the truth in his eyes.

“You don’t have to choose,” she said softly. “You only have to be honest.”

He laughed — a short, weary sound. “Honesty is what frightens them.”

“Then let it frighten them.”

He stared at her, stunned by the steadiness in her voice.

She stepped closer. “Solomon... I never asked you to choose me over the kingdom.”

“I know.”

“But I will not ask you to choose the kingdom over truth.”

He swallowed hard.

She touched his hand — gently, reverently, as if anchoring him to the earth.

“You said I see the kingdom clearly,” she murmured. “Then hear me now: a king who listens to truth is stronger than a king who bows to fear.”

He closed his eyes.

Her words settled into him like water into dry ground.

When he opened them again, something had shifted.

Not the weight he carried — that remained.

But the way he carried it.

He took her hand fully now, not with hesitation but with resolve.

“Shulamit,” he said, “I will not walk away. Not from you. Not from what we are building. Not from the man I am becoming.”

She felt her heart tremble — not with fear this time, but with fierce, aching hope.

“Then I am with you,” she whispered.

He exhaled — a long, shuddering breath — and pulled her into his arms.

They stood together on the hillside, the valley spread out below them, the morning bright around them.

For a moment, the world was quiet.

For a moment, the palace felt far away.

For a moment, they were simply two people choosing each other in the light.

But the moment passed.

Solomon stepped back, his expression tightening.

“I must return,” he said. “If I stay away too long, they will come looking.”

Shulamit nodded, though her heart ached.

He touched her cheek — gently, reverently.

“I will come again,” he said. “Soon.”

She held his gaze. “I will be here.”

He turned to go.

Then he paused.

“Shulamit?”

“Yes?”

He swallowed. “Your letters... they are the only place I can breathe.”

Her eyes softened. “Then breathe.”

He nodded once — a small, steadying gesture — and walked down the hill.

Shulamit watched him go, her hand pressed to her chest.

The ache was still there.

But beneath it, something else stirred.

Strength.

Resolve.

Love that was no longer fragile.

Love that was becoming fierce.

Love that was becoming destiny.

# Chapter 11 — The Separation

The decree was not shouted.

It was not announced with trumpets or sealed with ceremony.

It arrived quietly, slipped beneath Solomon's chamber door before dawn.

He knew what it was before he opened it.

The parchment was heavy, the script formal, the tone cold.

*The prince is not to leave Jerusalem without escort or permission until further notice.*

He read it twice.

Then he sat on the edge of his bed, elbows on his knees, the decree hanging loosely from his fingers.

They had moved faster than he expected.

He felt the walls of the palace closing in — not physically, but in the way a net closes around a fish. Slowly. Inevitably. With practiced hands.

He rose, paced, stopped, paced again.

He could not go to her.

Not today.

Not tomorrow.

Not until the court loosened its grip — and they would not loosen it willingly.

He pressed his palms to his eyes.

He had promised her he would return.

He had meant it.

He still meant it.

But the path to her had been cut off.

---

Shulamit waited.

She worked the terraces, but her eyes kept drifting toward the ridge. She listened for footsteps, for the rustle of someone approaching, for the sound of his voice calling her name.

Nothing.

By midday she had checked the road twice.

By evening she had checked it four times.

By nightfall she had stopped pretending she wasn't waiting.

She lit a lamp and sat at her small table, parchment before her, ink trembling on the tip of her brush.

She wrote his name.

Then she stopped.

Something felt wrong.

Not wrong like danger.

Wrong like absence.

She pressed her hand to her chest.

The ache was familiar — the ache from her dream, the ache from the night she had searched for him in the vineyard, calling his name into the darkness.

She closed her eyes.

*Not again.*

She rose abruptly, grabbed her shawl, and stepped into the night.

The vineyard was quiet.

The terraces were silver in the moonlight.

The fig trees rustled softly in the breeze.

She walked quickly, her breath sharp, her heart pounding.

“Solomon?”

Her voice echoed off the stone walls.

No answer.

She climbed the terraces, scanning the shadows.

“Solomon!”

Still nothing.

She reached the top terrace and stood there, trembling.

The night pressed in around her.

She felt the old fear rising — the fear from her dream, the fear of losing him, the fear of being left behind.

She closed her eyes and whispered, “Where are you?”

The wind answered, but not him.

---

In Jerusalem, Solomon stood at his window, staring toward the dark hills.

He could almost see her — the terraces, the fig trees, the place where she waited.

He pressed his forehead against the cool stone.

He whispered her name.

He whispered it again.

He whispered it until his voice broke.

Then he turned away.

He had to find a way through this.

He had to find a way back to her.

He had to find a way to be the man she believed he could be.

But tonight, he could do nothing.

Tonight, he was trapped.

---

Shulamit walked the vineyard until her legs ached.

She searched the terraces, the fig grove, the shepherd’s hill. She checked the road again and again, hoping for a silhouette, a shadow, a sign.

Nothing.

She sank to her knees in the dust.

Her breath came in short, sharp bursts.

She pressed her hands to her face.

“I sought him,” she whispered, “but found him not.”

The words felt like they had been waiting inside her.

She stayed there for a long time, the night cool around her, the earth solid beneath her knees.

Finally, she rose.

She walked back to her house slowly, each step heavy.

She lit the lamp again.

She sat at her table.

She picked up her brush.

And she wrote:

*I do not know what has happened.*

*But I am here.*

*I am waiting.*

*Come back to me.*

She folded the letter carefully, sealed it, and set it beside the lamp.

Then she blew out the flame.

The room went dark.

---

In Jerusalem, Solomon lay awake long after the palace slept.

He stared at the ceiling, the decree on the table beside him.

He felt the ache of distance like a physical wound.

He whispered into the darkness, “I will find you.”

And though the night did not answer, something inside him steadied.

He would not let this be the end.

He would not let fear win.

He would not let the court decide his future.

He would find a way back to her.

Even if he had to break the walls of the palace to do it.

## Chapter 12 — The Finding

Shulamit left before dawn.

She did not pack a bag.  
She did not tell her brothers.  
She did not wait for the sun to rise.

She wrapped her shawl around her shoulders, tucked the letter she had written into her sash, and stepped onto the road that led toward Jerusalem.

The air was cold, the sky pale, the world still half-asleep.

But her heart was awake.

Awake with longing.  
Awake with fear.  
Awake with a resolve she had never felt before.

She walked quickly at first, then faster, her sandals kicking up dust. The hills rose and fell around her, familiar and strange all at once. She had never traveled this road alone. She had never left the vineyard without knowing when she would return.

But she could not stay.

Not when something inside her whispered, *Go*.

Not when the silence of the past days felt like a wound.

Not when she could feel — in her bones, in her breath, in the trembling of her hands — that something had happened.

She reached the ridge overlooking the valley and paused, breathless.

Jerusalem was still far away.

But she kept walking.

---

Solomon slipped out of the palace at the same hour.

Not through the gates — those were watched.  
Not through the courtyard — too many eyes.  
Not through the main hall — Adonijah lingered there like a shadow.

He took the old servant's passage behind the kitchens, the one David had used in his youth. He moved quickly, cloak pulled tight, head down. He knew the guards' rotations. He knew which corners to avoid. He knew how to walk like a man who belonged everywhere and nowhere.

He reached the outer wall just as the sky began to lighten.

A single guard stood at the gate.

Solomon approached him slowly.

The guard stiffened. "My lord—"

Solomon raised a hand. "I need to leave."

"I have orders—"

"I know."

The guard swallowed.

Solomon stepped closer, lowering his voice. "If you stop me, I will not force my way through. But you will have to look me in the eye and tell me that I cannot go to the woman I love."

The guard's breath caught.

Solomon held his gaze.

The guard stepped aside.

Solomon nodded once — gratitude, not triumph — and walked into the morning.

---

Shulamit reached the halfway point by midmorning.

Her feet ached.

Her throat was dry.

Her shawl clung to her with dust and sweat.

But she did not stop.

She kept her eyes on the road, on the horizon, on the faint outline of the city walls.

She whispered his name under her breath, as if the sound could carry ahead of her.

"Solomon..."

A shepherd passed her with his flock and gave her a curious look. A merchant wagon rumbled by, the driver offering her a ride. She shook her head and kept walking.

She felt the ache of absence like a stone in her chest.

But beneath it, something else pulsed.

Hope.

Fierce, trembling hope.

---

Solomon descended the last hill before the valley.

He scanned the road ahead — empty.

He scanned the terraces behind him — empty.

He scanned the horizon — and froze.

A figure was walking toward him.

Small.

Steady.

Wrapped in a dusty shawl.

His heart lurched.

He took a step forward.

Then another.

Then he was running.

---

Shulamit saw movement on the ridge ahead.

A silhouette.

A man.

Moving quickly.

Then faster.

Then running.

Her breath caught.

She stopped.

The world narrowed to a single point.

“Solomon?”

Her voice was barely a whisper.

But he heard it.

He ran harder.

She took one step toward him.

Then another.

Then she was running too.

They met in the middle of the road, breathless, dusty, trembling.

Solomon reached her first, his hands cupping her face, his forehead pressed to hers.

“Shulamit—”

She let out a sound that was half-sob, half-laugh, her hands gripping his cloak as if afraid he might vanish.

“I thought—” she began.

“I know,” he whispered.

“I searched—”

“I know.”

“I couldn’t find you—”

“I’m here.”

She closed her eyes, tears slipping down her cheeks.

He wiped them gently with his thumb.

“I’m here,” he said again, voice breaking. “I will always find you.”

She leaned into him, her breath shaking.

He held her tightly, as if anchoring himself to the earth.

For a long moment, they simply stood there — two figures on a dusty road, wrapped in each other, the world around them fading into silence.

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When she finally pulled back, her eyes were fierce.

“What happened?” she asked.

He exhaled. “A decree. They tried to keep me in the city.”

Her jaw tightened. “Why?”

“Because they fear what I am becoming.”

“And what are you becoming?”

He looked at her — really looked — and felt the truth rise in him like a tide.

“The man who will not let them decide my future.”

Her breath trembled.

He took her hands.

“Shulamit,” he said softly, “I choose you. Not in secret. Not in shadows. Not in stolen moments. I choose you in the light.”

She felt her heart break open.

“And I choose you,” she whispered.

He closed his eyes, relief washing over him like rain.

When he opened them again, something had changed.

Not the danger.

Not the politics.

Not the cost.

But the [center](#)\* of him.

He was no longer a man torn between two worlds.

He was a man who had chosen his path.

And she was standing on it with him.

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They walked together toward the hills, hand in hand, the morning bright around them.

The road behind them was long.

The road ahead would be longer.

But for the first time, neither felt alone.

They had found each other.

And nothing — not decree, not fear, not palace intrigue — would undo that.

# Chapter 13 — David’s Blessing

David asked for Solomon at dusk.

The summons was simple, delivered by a servant with a bowed head and no explanation. Solomon felt his pulse quicken as he followed the familiar corridors — not with fear, but with the weight of inevitability. The court had whispered too loudly. Adonijah had smiled too sharply. Bathsheba had watched him with eyes full of questions.

And David... David had been silent.

The king’s chamber was dim when Solomon entered, lit only by a single oil lamp. David sat near the window, wrapped in a wool cloak despite the warmth of the evening. His hair was silver now, his face lined, but his eyes — those eyes that had once faced giants and armies — were clear.

“Come,” David said softly.

Solomon approached and knelt.

David studied him for a long moment, as if reading not his face but the shape of his soul.

“You have changed,” he said at last.

Solomon swallowed. “Yes.”

David nodded, unsurprised. “The court trembles.”

“I know.”

“They fear you.”

“I know.”

“They fear her.”

Solomon lifted his head. “They should not.”

David’s mouth curved — not into a smile, but into something like recognition.

“Tell me about her,” he said.

Solomon hesitated only a moment. Then he spoke — not with the guarded caution he used in the council chamber, not with the clipped precision he used with advisors, but with the honesty he had learned in the hills.

“She sees the kingdom clearly,” he said. “Not the maps or the borders or the treaties — the people. The land. The widows. The shepherd boys. The terraces. She sees what grows after battles, not the battles themselves.”

David’s eyes softened.

“She speaks truth,” Solomon continued. “Not to flatter. Not to wound. To steady. To call forth what is good. Her words... they anchor me.”

David leaned back, exhaling slowly. “Your mother fears she will make you vulnerable.”

“She makes me wise.”

David closed his eyes for a moment, as if letting the words settle.

When he opened them again, they were bright — and older than his years.

“Solomon,” he said quietly, “I have loved many women.”

Solomon said nothing.

David’s voice was steady, but there was a tremor beneath it — the tremor of memory.

“Some I loved with my heart. Some with my desire. Some with my pride. Some with my loneliness.” He paused, searching for the right word. “But only one ever stopped me from becoming a worse man than I was.”

Solomon felt the truth of it before David spoke her name.

“Abigail.”

David’s gaze drifted toward the window, toward a memory only he could see.

“She saw the truth of things,” he murmured. “She spoke with courage when others trembled. She steadied my hand when anger clouded my judgment. She reminded me of the man God called me to be.”

He looked back at Solomon, eyes sharp now.

“And you speak of this Shulamit the way I once spoke of her.”

Solomon’s breath caught.

David leaned forward, his voice low and certain. “A king does not need a woman who strengthens his alliances. He needs a woman who strengthens his soul.”

The room was quiet.

Outside, the last light of day faded from the sky.

David reached out and placed a hand on Solomon's shoulder — the hand that had once held a sling, a harp, a crown.

“Bring her to me,” he said. “Let me see the one who steadies my son.”

Solomon's breath trembled.

David's grip tightened, gentle but firm. “I will not stand in the way of what God is doing in you. Nor will I let the court do so.”

Solomon lifted his head, eyes burning.

David nodded once — a gesture of blessing, of release, of recognition.

“Go to her,” he said. “And when you return, bring her with you.”

Solomon bowed deeply, not as a prince to a king, but as a son to a father.

When he rose, David's eyes were shining.

“Solomon,” he said softly, “you are becoming the kind of man who can bear a crown.”

Solomon felt the words settle into him like a seal.

He left the chamber with a steady step, the weight of fear falling away behind him.

The path ahead was still dangerous.

The court would still resist.

Adonijah would still whisper.

Michal would still mock.

But David had blessed the union.

And that changed everything.

# Chapter 14 — The Wedding

The day of the wedding dawned clear and bright, the kind of morning that felt like a promise.

Jerusalem stirred early. Servants swept the courtyards. Musicians tuned their lyres. The elders gathered in quiet clusters, whispering predictions they pretended were concerns. Even the palace guards stood straighter, sensing that something was shifting — not in politics, but in the air itself.

Solomon stood in the inner courtyard, dressed simply, not as a prince adorned for spectacle but as a man prepared for covenant. His cloak was white, his sash woven with threads of gold and deep green — the colors of the hills where he had found her. His hands trembled slightly, not with fear, but with the weight of joy.

David watched him from a carved cedar chair, wrapped in a cloak of deep blue. His eyes were bright, clearer than they had been in months. He looked not at the court, not at the advisors, not at the nobles who had gathered to witness the event.

He looked at his son.

“You are steady,” David murmured.

Solomon exhaled. “Because she steadies me.”

David nodded, satisfied.

The gates opened.

And Shulamit entered.

She did not come draped in jewels or silks. She wore a gown the color of cream and sunlight, simple and elegant, woven by her mother and sisters. Her hair was braided with small blossoms from the vineyard — fig flowers, vine tendrils, a single pomegranate bloom tucked behind her ear. She walked with the quiet confidence of someone who knew exactly who she was.

The court fell silent.

Not because she was beautiful — though she was.

But because she was *real*.

A woman of the land.

A woman of truth.

A woman who carried wisdom like a mantle.

Bathsheba inhaled sharply, her eyes softening. Michal's lips tightened, but even she could not deny the presence Shulamit carried. Adonijah's expression flickered — surprise, then calculation, then something like resignation.

David rose slowly, leaning on his staff.

Shulamit approached him first.

She bowed her head, not in subservience, but in respect.

David studied her — the steadiness of her gaze, the strength in her posture, the quiet fire in her eyes.

“You remind me of someone,” he said softly.

Shulamit tilted her head. “Who, my lord?”

“Abigail,” David whispered. “A woman who saved me from myself.”

Shulamit's breath caught.

David smiled — a small, knowing smile. “And I see in you the same courage. The same clarity. The same truth.”

He placed a hand on her cheek, fatherly and gentle.

“You will make my son more than he is.”

Shulamit's eyes glistened.

David stepped back and lifted his voice, strong despite his age.

“Let the procession begin.”

The musicians struck their strings.

The courtyard filled with sound — not triumphant, but warm, like the first notes of a psalm rising from the heart of the people.

Solomon stepped forward.

Shulamit met him halfway.

They stood facing each other, the world narrowing to a single point of light between them.

Solomon took her hands.

“Shulamit,” he said, voice steady, “you have been my truth in the hills, my courage in the palace, my breath when the world pressed in. I choose you — not in secret, not in fear, but in the light of God and before all who stand here.”

Her fingers tightened around his.

“Solomon,” she whispered, “you have been my joy in the vineyard, my strength in the night, my hope when silence felt like loss. I choose you — not because you are a prince, but because you are the man who listens to truth.”

A murmur rippled through the court — not disapproval, but awe.

David lifted his staff.

“Then let your vows be sealed.”

Solomon placed his hand over his heart.

“Set me as a seal upon your heart,” he said, “and I will set you upon mine.”

Shulamit’s breath trembled.

“For love is strong as death,” she replied, “and its flame is the flame of God.”

The words hung in the air like fire.

David lowered his staff.

“It is done.”

The courtyard erupted in music — flutes, lyres, drums, voices rising in celebration. Servants brought out wine. Children danced. Elders nodded with approval they would never admit aloud.

Solomon leaned close, his forehead touching Shulamit’s.

“We made it,” he whispered.

She smiled — a soft, radiant smile that felt like sunrise.

“Yes,” she said. “We did.”

He took her hand.

Together, they stepped into the light.

Not as prince and vineyard girl.

Not as lovers separated and reunited.

But as partners — equal, chosen, sealed — ready to shape a kingdom with wisdom, justice, and love.

The kind of love that could steady a king.

The kind of love that could steady a nation.

The kind of love the Song would remember forever.

# Chapter 15 — Epilogue: The Anointing

David died at dawn.

Not suddenly.  
Not in fear.  
Not alone.

Shulamit was there, standing beside Solomon. Bathsheba held David's hand. Nathan prayed softly. The old king's breath grew thin, then thinner still, until it slipped from him like a final psalm returning to the God who had given it.

The palace fell into a hush.

But the hush did not last.

By midday, the court fractured.

Whispers sharpened into plans.  
Plans hardened into factions.  
And one name rose above the murmurs like a storm wind.

Adonijah.

He moved quickly — too quickly.  
A feast.  
A sacrifice.  
A gathering of men who had waited years for David's strength to fade.

The city trembled.

But Solomon did not.

He stood in the chamber where his father had blessedd him, the memory of David's hand on his shoulder still warm.

Shulamit touched his arm. "The kingdom is shaking."

"Yes," Solomon said. "But I am not."

Nathan entered, breathless. "The time has come."

Bathsheba followed, her face pale but resolute. "Your father's word must be fulfilled."

Solomon nodded.

He did not reach for a sword.  
He did not summon an army.  
He did not shout or rage or panic.

He simply breathed — steady, centered, anchored.

The way Shulamit had taught him.  
The way Abigail had once taught David.  
The way wisdom teaches all who listen.

Nathan placed a hand on Solomon's back. "Come. The people wait."

They moved quickly through the palace, down the stone steps, out into the sunlight. The city buzzed with tension, but when the people saw Solomon, something shifted — a murmur of recognition, of relief, of hope.

Zadok the priest met them at the Gihon spring, the place where kings were made.

He held a horn of oil.

"By the command of David," Zadok said, "and by the will of the Lord, we anoint Solomon, son of David, as king over Israel."

Solomon bowed his head.

The oil touched his brow — cool, fragrant, heavy with meaning.

The crowd erupted.

Trumpets sounded.  
Voices rose.  
The city shook — not with fear, but with joy.

Adonijah's feast collapsed in panic.  
His supporters fled.  
The coup dissolved like mist in sunlight.

But Solomon did not gloat.

He lifted his hands, not in triumph, but in prayer.

"Give the king Your justice, O God," he whispered, "and Your righteousness to the son of the king."

Shulamit stepped beside him.

Not behind him.  
Beside him.

The people saw it.  
The court saw it.  
The priests saw it.

A king and a queen — not joined by politics, but by truth.  
Not shaped by ambition, but by love.  
Not driven by fear, but by wisdom.

Solomon looked at her, and she at him.

The kingdom had begun.

Not with a battle.  
Not with a coup.  
Not with a spectacle.

But with a heart made steady.  
A love made strong.  
A calling made clear.

And the Song — their Song — would remember it forever.

## Author's Notes

# Chapter 1 — What This Chapter Does

Chapter 1 introduces Shulamit as the moral and emotional center of the story — a woman whose life instinctively embodies the justice, generosity, and dignity that will one day shape Solomon's imagination of kingship. We see her tending the vineyard with wisdom, caring for orphans and widows, practicing gleaning, and carrying her sun-darkened skin with pride. This chapter establishes her world before Solomon enters it, grounding her identity not in romance but in covenantal faithfulness. It also sets the tone: this is a story where love grows out of integrity, not fantasy.

### How It Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

The Song begins with a woman who is confident, sun-darkened, hardworking, and unashamed of her origins — “Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me.” Chapter 1 brings that line to life in narrative form. Instead of merely quoting it, you see the world that produced her: the terraces, the gleaning rows, the widows she protects, the children she feeds. The poem hints at her labor and her dignity; the chapter fleshes it out so the reader feels the weight and beauty of her life before Solomon ever appears.

### Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Explicitly echoed:**  
“Do not gaze at me because I am dark...” (Song 1:6) — embodied in her sun-darkened skin and her quiet pride.
- **Implied:**  
“My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards.” (Song 1:6) — reflected in her brothers' grumbling and her responsibility for the vineyard.
- **Foreshadowed:**  
“Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock...” (Song 1:7) — hinted in her interactions with the shepherd children and the land.

### How It Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 imagines a king who defends the poor, delivers the needy, and ensures justice for the vulnerable. Chapter 1 shows Shulamit already living those values. When Solomon later encounters her, he is encountering the living embodiment of the psalm he will one day pray. This chapter plants the seed: **the woman he will love is the one who will teach him what righteous kingship looks like.**

# Chapter 2 — What This Chapter Does

Chapter 2 introduces Solomon as a young man who is already restless under the weight of royal expectation. He slips out of the palace not to rebel, but to breathe — to see the world without being seen. This chapter humanizes him before he meets Shulamit: he is curious, observant, hungry for truth, and quietly burdened by the future he’s expected to carry. When he encounters Shulamit for the first time, he sees not beauty alone but justice embodied — a woman who lives the Torah instinctively. This moment becomes the hinge of his transformation: the future king begins to learn from a vineyard girl what righteous rule actually looks like.

## How It Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

The Song of Songs begins with a woman who is confident and sun-darkened, but it also hints at a man who is captivated not merely by her appearance but by her character. Chapter 2 dramatizes the poem’s implied backstory: *why* Solomon is so drawn to her. The poem never tells us how they met; this chapter gives that meeting emotional and theological depth. Solomon sees her caring for widows, protecting children, practicing gleaning, and working with dignity — all the qualities that later appear in the Song’s praise of her strength, steadiness, and beauty. This chapter also sets up the Song’s recurring theme of **mutual recognition**: he sees her truly before she ever sees him.

## Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Implied strongly:**  
“Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock...” (Song 1:7)  
Solomon watches her among shepherds and workers, seeing her in her natural world.
- **Foreshadowed:**  
“Your name is oil poured out...” (Song 1:3)  
His character — his listening, his humility, his hunger for truth — is what draws her later.
- **Echoed in tone:**  
“My beloved is to me...” (Song 1:14–16)  
The chapter lays the groundwork for the mutual admiration that will later bloom into poetry.
- **Background resonance:**  
“The king has brought me into his chambers...” (Song 1:4)  
Here, the inverse happens: the king leaves his chambers to find the world she inhabits.

## How It Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 describes a king who:

- defends the poor
- delivers the needy
- judges with righteousness

- brings flourishing to the land

In Chapter 2, Solomon sees these values lived out in Shulamit's everyday actions:

“She pressed a small pouch of wages into the woman's hand and closed her fingers around it.”

“She handed the child a few grapes from the gleaning rows.”

These are Psalm 72 values in miniature.

This chapter plants the seed that **the kingdom is not built in the palace — it is built in the hills, among the people, through justice lived quietly and faithfully**. Solomon's longing to be a good king begins here; in the moment he sees a woman who embodies the very righteousness he has been taught but not yet witnessed.

## Chapter 3 — What This Chapter Does

Chapter 3 is the first true meeting — the moment when two lives, already rich and distinct, begin to intertwine. It establishes the tone of their relationship: honest, equal, unvarnished, and grounded in shared work rather than courtly performance. Shulamit speaks to Solomon without fear or flattery, and Solomon responds not with princely authority but with humility and curiosity. This chapter shows the first spark of mutual recognition: she sees a man who listens; he sees a woman who lives justice instinctively. Their banter, their shared labor, and their growing attentiveness to one another lay the emotional foundation for everything that follows.

## How It Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

The Song of Songs is full of playful, intimate, mutual admiration — but the poem never shows how that dynamic began. Chapter 3 provides the narrative origin of the Song’s tone: the teasing, the delight, the mutual pursuit. Shulamit’s directness (“Are you lost?”) and Solomon’s awkward sincerity mirror the poem’s lively exchanges. The chapter also dramatizes the poem’s theme of **mutual choosing**: she tests him (“Do you know anything about vineyards?”), and he chooses to stay; he reveals vulnerability, and she chooses to trust him slowly. Their first conversations echo the Song’s early interplay of admiration and testing, desire and restraint, curiosity and respect. This chapter is the narrative embodiment of the poem’s opening chemistry.

## Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Implied strongly:**  
“Tell me, you whom my soul loves...” (Song 1:7)  
Their first conversation is full of questions — honest, searching, revealing.
- **Echoed in tone:**  
“My beloved is to me...” (Song 1:14–16)  
Their mutual admiration begins here, not in poetry but in shared labor and gentle teasing.
- **Foreshadowed:**  
“Draw me after you; let us run...” (Song 1:4)  
Solomon keeps returning to her — drawn not by beauty alone but by her steadiness and clarity.
- **Background resonance:**  
“The vineyards of En-gedi...” (Song 1:14)  
The vineyard setting becomes the sacred ground of their early connection.

## How It Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 imagines a king who judges with righteousness, defends the poor, and brings flourishing to the land. In Chapter 3, Solomon begins to learn these values not from tutors or scrolls but from Shulamit’s lived example. He watches her pay widows fairly, guide younger workers, and tend the land with reverence. Her simple line — “*The land forgives, if you do better next time*” — becomes a quiet theological lesson in mercy, justice, and humility. This chapter marks the beginning of Solomon’s transformation: he is no longer merely a prince

destined for greatness; he is a young man being shaped by a woman whose life embodies the kingdom he longs to build. Shulamit becomes the living commentary on Psalm 72 before he ever prays it.

## Chapter 4 — What This Chapter Does

Chapter 4 is the crucible — the moment when Shulamit steps into Solomon’s world and faces the full force of class, color, and political scrutiny. It is her first encounter with the palace, and it exposes the social and emotional cost of loving a prince. The banquet becomes a test not only of her dignity but of Solomon’s integrity. Abigail’s intervention reveals the moral fault lines of the court, and Solomon’s public declaration — “My banner over you is honor” — becomes the first open act of defiance against the palace’s expectations. This chapter marks the shift from private affection to public allegiance. It is the moment the kingdom sees her, and the moment Solomon chooses her in the light.

### How It Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

The Song of Songs contains a tension between public scrutiny and private devotion. The woman says:

“Do not gaze at me because I am dark...” (Song 1:6)  
“My mother’s sons were angry with me...” (Song 1:6)

Chapter 4 dramatizes this tension by placing Shulamit in a hall full of women who judge her skin, her hands, her clothing, and her worth. The poem also contains a moment where the beloved is brought into the king’s chambers and honored:

“The king has brought me into his chambers; we will rejoice and be glad in you.” (Song 1:4)

This chapter reverses the dynamic: instead of the king bringing her into his chambers, he crosses the hall to honor her publicly. This is the narrative embodiment of the poem’s theme of **mutual choosing** and **public affirmation**. The banquet becomes the story behind the poem’s confidence — the reason she can later say:

“His banner over me is love.” (Song 2:4)

### Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Explicitly echoed:**  
“Do not gaze at me because I am dark...” (Song 1:6)  
The women’s comments about her skin and hands bring this line to life.
- **Implied strongly:**  
“My mother’s sons were angry with me...” (Song 1:6)  
Her brothers’ earlier grumbling and her outsider status echo this theme.
- **Directly embodied:**  
“His banner over me is love.” (Song 2:4)  
Solomon’s public declaration — “My banner over you is honor” — is the narrative origin of this line.

- **Foreshadowed:**  
*“You are beautiful, my love, lovely...”* (Song 1:15)  
 Solomon’s gaze across the hall mirrors the poem’s admiring tone.
- **Background resonance:**  
*“The daughters of Jerusalem...”* (Song 1:5; 2:7; 3:5)  
 The women’s hall becomes the narrative version of the poem’s “daughters of Jerusalem,” who alternately judge, question, and witness the love story.

## How It Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 envisions a king who:

- judges with righteousness
- defends the oppressed
- protects the vulnerable
- honors the poor
- refuses to be swayed by the powerful

In Chapter 4, Solomon practices these values before he ever ascends the throne. He sees Shulamit being humiliated and chooses to honor her publicly. He refuses to let political pressure dictate his affections. He listens to Abigail’s wisdom — a model of righteous counsel — and acts with courage rather than calculation. This chapter is the first moment where Solomon behaves like the king of Psalm 72: a man who lifts up the lowly, confronts injustice, and uses his authority to protect rather than to dominate. Shulamit’s dignity becomes the measure of his righteousness.

## Chapter 5 — What This Chapter Does

Chapter 5 is the “springtime awakening” of the story — the moment when fear begins to give way to desire, when uncertainty softens into trust, and when Solomon and Shulamit step into a new emotional landscape together. After the banquet’s humiliation and Solomon’s public defense, this chapter brings them back to the land, where their relationship can grow without the palace’s gaze. Their walk through the hills becomes a shared revelation: Solomon sees the kingdom through her eyes, and Shulamit sees the man behind the prince. This chapter deepens their bond, clarifies their values, and sets the emotional tone for the rest of the novella. It is the first time they choose each other freely, without pressure or spectacle.

## How It Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

This chapter is the narrative embodiment of **Song of Songs 2:8–17**, the “springtime call”:

“Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.”  
“For behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone.”

The poem’s imagery — hills, vineyards, fig trees, blossoms, the voice of the beloved calling — is translated into story. Solomon invites her into the hills of his childhood; she teaches him to see the land not as territory won but as life tended. Their walk becomes the narrative origin of the poem’s pastoral imagery and mutual delight. The chapter also echoes the Song’s theme of **mutual transformation**: he sees the kingdom differently because of her; she sees herself differently because of him. This is the moment when the poem’s emotional world — tender, playful, awakening — becomes flesh.

## Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Directly embodied:**  
“Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.” (Song 2:10)  
Solomon’s invitation to walk the hills is the narrative form of this call.
- **Implied strongly:**  
“For now the winter is past...” (Song 2:11–13)  
Their walk through the warming hills mirrors the poem’s springtime imagery.
- **Echoed in tone:**  
“My beloved is mine, and I am his; he grazes among the lilies.” (Song 2:16)  
Their growing mutuality and trust foreshadow this declaration.
- **Foreshadowed:**  
“The fig tree ripens its figs...” (Song 2:13)  
Shulamit’s knowledge of the land and its seasons brings this imagery to life.
- **Background resonance:**  
“Let me see your face, let me hear your voice...” (Song 2:14)  
Solomon’s desire to know her world and hear her truth echoes this longing.

# How It Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 envisions a king who:

- judges with righteousness
- brings flourishing to the land
- defends the poor
- listens to the people
- rules with compassion

In Chapter 5, Solomon begins to see the kingdom not as a map of borders but as a living ecosystem of people, land, and justice. Shulamit shows him widows, shepherd boys, terraces, herbs, and the rhythms of ordinary life. He realizes that a king must know the land he rules — not from scrolls, but from walking it with someone who loves it. Her line — *“You see battles; I see what grows after them”* — becomes a theological turning point. This chapter is where Solomon’s imagination shifts from conquest to cultivation, from power to stewardship. It is the moment he begins to become the man who will pray Psalm 72.

## Chapter 6 — What This Chapter Does

Chapter 6 is the emotional crucible of the novella — the moment when Shulamit’s fear finally surfaces and must be confronted. After the banquet and the springtime walk, she has tasted both the beauty and the cost of loving Solomon. This chapter shows her wrestling with the vulnerability of love: fear of abandonment, fear of unworthiness, fear of losing herself. Solomon’s nighttime search for her reveals his own devotion and steadiness. Her dream sequence becomes the symbolic center of the story — a vision of searching, losing, and finding that mirrors her waking fears. By the end, she emerges with a deeper, fiercer love, no longer naïve but chosen with trembling courage. This chapter marks the transition from early affection to covenantal resolve.

### How It Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

This chapter is the narrative embodiment of **Song of Songs 3:1–4**, the “nighttime searching” passage:

“On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves;  
I sought him, but found him not.  
I will rise now and go about the city...  
I sought him, but found him not.  
I found him whom my soul loves.”

The poem’s emotional arc — fear, searching, longing, finding — becomes literal in Shulamit’s dream and symbolic in her waking turmoil. Her nighttime wandering in the vineyard mirrors the woman’s nighttime wandering in the city. Solomon’s arrival, breathless and searching for her, reverses the poem’s dynamic but preserves its emotional truth: both lovers seek, both fear, both find. The chapter also echoes the Song’s theme of **love as both joy and risk**, and it sets up the later refrain:

“Do not awaken love until it pleases.” (Song 2:7; 3:5)

Here, love awakens — and it is terrifying and beautiful.

### Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Directly embodied:**  
“*On my bed by night I sought him...*” (Song 3:1–4)  
Shulamit’s dream is the narrative form of this passage.
- **Implied strongly:**  
“*I sought him, but found him not.*”  
Her fear of losing him and her nighttime wandering echo this refrain.
- **Echoed in tone:**  
“*I found him whom my soul loves.*”  
Solomon finding her in the vineyard at night mirrors this moment.

- **Foreshadowed:**  
*“His banner over me is love.”* (Song 2:4)  
 His nighttime search for her deepens the meaning of his earlier public declaration.
- **Background resonance:**  
*“Love is strong as death...”* (Song 8:6)  
 Her fear of losing him hints at the depth of love that will later be named explicitly.

## How It Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 envisions a king who:

- rescues the needy
- defends the vulnerable
- listens to the cries of the afflicted
- embodies compassion and steadfastness

In Chapter 6, Solomon practices these values not in a courtroom but in the vineyard at night. He searches for Shulamit with urgency and tenderness, revealing a heart shaped not by power but by compassion. His line — *“I will not walk away. Not from you.”* — is the emotional seed of the steadfastness Psalm 72 celebrates. Shulamit’s vulnerability becomes the place where Solomon learns to be gentle, attentive, and faithful. This chapter shows that the king who will one day defend the poor first learned to defend the heart of the woman he loved.

# Chapter 7 — What This Chapter Does

Chapter 7 is the moment when the private love of Chapters 3–6 is suddenly thrust into public view. Solomon arrives in full royal procession — armor, banners, soldiers — and Shulamit sees him not as the man who walked the hills with her, but as the prince who carries the weight of Israel’s future. This chapter forces her to confront the cost of loving him: the distance between their worlds, the power he wields, and the scrutiny that will follow her. Yet Solomon’s steady, deliberate approach — bowing his head, choosing her in front of her family and village — becomes a counterweight to her fear. This chapter deepens their bond by showing that his private devotion is matched by public commitment. It is the moment when hope becomes fierce rather than fragile.

## How It Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

This chapter is the narrative embodiment of **Song of Songs 3:6–11**, the royal procession passage:

“What is that coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke...  
Behold, it is the litter of Solomon...  
King Solomon made himself a carriage...  
Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon...”

The poem describes a breathtaking royal procession — a moment of awe, splendor, and public recognition. Chapter 7 translates that imagery into story: the glint of bronze, the banners snapping in the wind, the villagers parting, the prince dismounting and walking toward her. The emotional tension of the poem — the beloved seeing her lover in royal majesty — becomes Shulamit’s shock and trembling. The chapter also echoes the Song’s theme of **public affirmation**: Solomon’s bow and his words (“I came to see you”) mirror the poem’s invitation for the community to witness the love. This is the moment when the Song’s royal imagery becomes flesh.

## Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Directly embodied:**  
“*What is that coming up from the wilderness...?*” (Song 3:6)  
The villagers seeing the procession over the ridge mirrors this line.
- **Implied strongly:**  
“*Behold, it is the litter of Solomon...*” (Song 3:7)  
Solomon’s armored arrival echoes the poem’s royal spectacle.
- **Echoed in tone:**  
“*Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon...*” (Song 3:11)  
The villagers watching in awe parallels this communal moment.
- **Foreshadowed:**  
“*His banner over me is love.*” (Song 2:4)  
Shulamit’s memory of his earlier declaration steadies her as she sees him in royal form.

- **Background resonance:**  
*“My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand.”* (Song 5:10)  
Her awe at seeing him in armor hints at this later description.

## **How It Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72**

Psalm 72 envisions a king who:

- rules with justice
- defends the poor
- brings peace and flourishing
- embodies humility despite power

In Chapter 7, Solomon models the humility and justice of Psalm 72 even while clothed in royal splendor. He does not use his procession to intimidate or impress; he uses it to honor Shulamit. His bow before her — a prince bowing to a vineyard girl — is a radical act of humility and justice. It signals that his kingship will not be built on alliances or appearances, but on truth and righteousness. Shulamit’s fear (“I don’t know if I can do this”) becomes the place where Solomon reassures her with gentleness rather than command. This chapter shows that the man who will one day pray Psalm 72 is already learning to wield power with compassion, humility, and love.

## Chapter 8 — What This Chapter Does

Chapter 8 is the hinge between the intimate world of the lovers and the political world of the palace. Through the letters, we see Solomon and Shulamit’s love deepen in honesty, longing, and mutual shaping. But when the fourth letter is discovered, their private devotion becomes a public threat. This chapter reveals how powerful their love already is: it steadies Solomon, clarifies his vision, and threatens those who rely on palace politics. Bathsheba, Michal, Adonijah, and David each respond in ways that expose their character and their fears. Shulamit, unaware of the storm she has stirred, continues to write with the same sincerity that first captured Solomon’s heart. This chapter marks the beginning of the external conflict — not to overshadow the love story, but to test and refine it.

### How It Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

This chapter is the narrative embodiment of **Song of Songs 3:1–5** and **5:2–8** — the passages of longing, searching, and the vulnerability of love.

- The letters echo the poem’s repeated refrain of longing:

“I sought him whom my soul loves...”  
“I am sick with love.”

- Shulamit’s dreams mirror the poem’s nighttime searching:

“I sought him, but found him not.”

- Solomon’s replies echo the poem’s mutual desire and admiration:

“Your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.”

- The court’s intrusion mirrors the poem’s tension between the lovers and the “daughters of Jerusalem,” who alternately witness, misunderstand, and interfere.
- Bathsheba’s fear and Michal’s disdain echo the poem’s social pressure:

“Do not gaze at me because I am dark...”

- Adonijah’s whispers mirror the poem’s warnings about love being “strong as death” — powerful enough to unsettle the world around it.

This chapter shows the **cost** of the love celebrated in the Song. It is the narrative explanation for why the lovers cling so fiercely to one another in the poem.

## Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Directly embodied:**  
*“I sought him whom my soul loves...”* (Song 3:1)  
Shulamit’s dreams and letters echo this longing.
- **Implied strongly:**  
*“I am sick with love.”* (Song 5:8)  
Her trembling, her ache, her repeated searching in dreams.
- **Echoed in tone:**  
*“His left hand is under my head...”* (Song 2:6)  
The tenderness of their letters, the emotional intimacy.
- **Foreshadowed:**  
*“Love is strong as death...”* (Song 8:6)  
Bathsheba’s fear and Adonijah’s alarm at the power of Shulamit’s influence.
- **Background resonance:**  
*“The daughters of Jerusalem...”* (Song 1:5; 2:7; 3:5)  
The palace women’s whispers and judgments mirror this chorus.

## How It Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 envisions a king who:

- listens to the cries of the needy
- judges with righteousness
- protects the vulnerable
- resists corrupt counsel
- rules with compassion and integrity

In Chapter 8, Solomon’s letters reveal the heart of such a king. Shulamit’s words steady him in council chambers filled with political noise. Her clarity becomes his compass. Her love becomes the anchor that keeps him from being swept into palace intrigue. When Bathsheba confronts him, Solomon speaks with the moral clarity of a future Psalm 72 king:

“She sees the kingdom more clearly than half the men in this palace.”

This chapter shows that Shulamit is not a distraction from his calling — she is the one who helps him become the king he longs to be. Her love is not a threat to the kingdom; it is the seed of its righteousness.

# Literacy in Ancient Judah and the Plausibility of Shulamit's Letters

## Chapter 9

Chapter 9 shows the palace beginning to fracture under the weight of Solomon and Shulamit's love. The fourth letter, discovered by a servant and delivered to Bathsheba, becomes the spark that exposes the fears, ambitions, and loyalties of the court. Bathsheba is shaken by the depth of Shulamit's words; Michal turns her disdain into open mockery; Adonijah begins sowing political doubt; and David watches silently, discerning the truth beneath the noise. Solomon feels the pressure tightening around him but refuses to retreat from the woman whose words steady him. Meanwhile, Shulamit, unaware of the turmoil she has stirred, writes another letter by lamplight, her love becoming both a comfort to Solomon and a threat to those who fear a king shaped by righteousness rather than politics.

### How Chapter 9 Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

This chapter narrates the *social pressure* and *communal tension* that the Song of Songs hints at but never explicitly describes. The poem repeatedly references the “daughters of Jerusalem,” a chorus of onlookers who judge, question, misunderstand, and sometimes support the lovers. Chapter 9 gives these voices flesh: Michal's scorn, Bathsheba's fear, Adonijah's ambition, the advisors' whispers. The Song's emotional world — where love is powerful enough to unsettle the community — becomes literal here. Shulamit's longing letters echo the poem's repeated refrains of desire and searching, while the court's reaction mirrors the poem's tension between private devotion and public scrutiny. This chapter shows why the lovers cling so fiercely to one another in the Song: because their love is strong enough to shake the structures around them.

### Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Implied strongly:**  
“Do not gaze at me because I am dark...” (Song 1:6)  
Michal's disdain and the court's judgment echo this social pressure.
- **Echoed in tone:**  
“I am sick with love.” (Song 5:8)  
Shulamit's letters carry the same trembling longing.
- **Foreshadowed:**  
“Love is strong as death...” (Song 8:6)  
Bathsheba's fear and Adonijah's alarm reveal the disruptive power of their love.
- **Background resonance:**  
“The daughters of Jerusalem...” (Song 1:5; 2:7; 3:5)  
The palace women's whispers and judgments mirror this chorus.

- **Narrative echo:**  
*“I sought him whom my soul loves...”* (Song 3:1)  
Shulamit’s longing in her letters anticipates the searching to come.

## How Chapter 9 Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 describes a king who:

- resists corrupt counsel
- judges with righteousness
- defends the vulnerable
- listens to truth rather than flattery
- stands firm under pressure

In Chapter 9, Solomon begins to embody these qualities. Surrounded by political manipulation, whispered doubts, and familial pressure, he refuses to let fear or ambition dictate his heart. Shulamit’s words steady him in council chambers filled with noise and calculation. His clarity in the face of intrigue — his refusal to be swayed by Michal’s scorn or Adonijah’s ambition — reveals the emerging character of a king who will one day pray for justice, compassion, and righteousness. This chapter shows that Solomon’s path to Psalm 72 does not begin on the throne but in the crucible of love, where he learns to stand firm, discern truth, and resist the corrosive pull of palace politics.

# Chapter 10

Chapter 10 brings Solomon back to the vineyard in a moment of exhaustion, longing, and resolve. After the palace erupts with fear and intrigue over Shulamit's letters, he leaves at dawn to see her — not as a prince escaping duty, but as a man choosing truth over politics. Their reunion is tender but heavy: Shulamit sees the cost etched into his face, and Solomon confesses the turmoil her words have stirred. Together they walk the hills, speaking honestly about fear, calling, and the price of love. Shulamit refuses to let him choose between her and the kingdom; instead, she calls him to be the man he is becoming. Their conversation becomes a moment of mutual courage, where love deepens into resolve. Solomon returns to Jerusalem steadier, anchored by her truth, and Shulamit remains on the hillside with a new, fierce hope.

## How Chapter 10 Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

Chapter 10 narrates the “**springtime call**” of Song of Songs 2:8–17 — but with emotional realism and narrative weight. The poem's imagery of the beloved leaping over mountains and calling, “*Arise, my love, and come away,*” becomes Solomon's dawn journey back to the hills. Their walk through the terraces echoes the poem's pastoral world: fig trees, vines, blossoms, and the lovers speaking in the open air. But the chapter also honors the poem's deeper emotional truth: the call to come away is not carefree; it is courageous. The lovers must choose one another in the face of fear, scrutiny, and cost. The poem's mutual admiration becomes mutual resolve. The chapter gives flesh to the Song's emotional arc — longing, reunion, honesty, and the awakening of a love that is no longer fragile but fierce.

## 3. Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Directly embodied:**  
*“Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.”* (Song 2:10)  
Solomon's invitation to walk the hills mirrors this call.
- **Implied strongly:**  
*“For behold, the winter is past...”* (Song 2:11–13)  
Their walk through the warming hills echoes the poem's springtime imagery.
- **Echoed in tone:**  
*“My beloved is mine, and I am his.”* (Song 2:16)  
Their mutual choosing and deepening trust foreshadow this declaration.
- **Foreshadowed:**  
*“Let me see your face, let me hear your voice...”* (Song 2:14)  
Solomon's longing for her presence and her words echoes this desire.
- **Background resonance:**  
*“The fig tree ripens its figs...”* (Song 2:13)  
The vineyard and hillside setting brings this imagery to life.

## How Chapter 10 Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 envisions a king who:

- listens to truth
- resists corrupt counsel
- rules with righteousness
- protects the vulnerable
- embodies humility and compassion

In Chapter 10, Solomon begins to embody these qualities not in a throne room but on a hillside with Shulamit. Her honesty becomes his compass. Her courage steadies him. Her vision of the kingdom — rooted in justice, mercy, and the flourishing of ordinary people — becomes the lens through which he begins to see his calling. When she tells him, “A king who listens to truth is stronger than a king who bows to fear,” she gives him the heart of Psalm 72 before he ever prays it. This chapter marks a turning point: Solomon is no longer shaped by palace politics but by covenantal love and moral clarity. He returns to Jerusalem not weakened by love but strengthened by it — ready to resist fear, discern truth, and grow into the king God intends him to be.

# Chapter 11

## One-Paragraph Narrative Summary

Chapter 11 is the emotional low point of the novella — the moment when external forces finally succeed in separating the lovers. A quiet decree traps Solomon inside Jerusalem, cutting him off from the hills and from Shulamit. He feels the walls of the palace closing around him, powerless for the first time. Meanwhile, Shulamit senses the absence immediately. Her waiting turns to worry, then to searching, echoing the fear from her earlier dream. She wanders the vineyard at night, calling his name into the darkness, but finds only silence. Both lovers ache across the distance: Solomon staring toward the hills he cannot reach, Shulamit writing a letter she does not know will ever be delivered. This chapter embodies longing, fear, and the ache of separation — the winter before the spring.

## How Chapter 11 Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

Chapter 11 narrates the Song’s **nighttime searching passages** with emotional realism and narrative weight. The poem’s lines — “On my bed by night I sought him,” “I sought him, but found him not” — become Shulamit’s nighttime wandering through the terraces, calling for Solomon in the moonlight. The poem’s emotional world of longing, fear, and vulnerability becomes literal in her trembling search and in Solomon’s helplessness behind palace walls. The chapter also honors the Song’s theme of **love under pressure**: the lovers’ devotion is tested not by doubt but by circumstance, by forces beyond their control. The ache of absence, the unanswered calling, the whispered “Where are you?” — all of these give flesh to the poem’s emotional center. This chapter is the narrative explanation for why the Song’s love is so fierce: because it has survived separation.

## Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Directly embodied:**  
*“On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not.”* (Song 3:1)  
Shulamit’s nighttime search mirrors this passage exactly.
- **Implied strongly:**  
*“I will rise now and go about the city... I sought him, but found him not.”* (Song 3:2)  
Her wandering through the vineyard at night echoes the poem’s searching.
- **Echoed in tone:**  
*“I am sick with love.”* (Song 5:8)  
The ache of absence and the trembling longing in both lovers.
- **Foreshadowed:**  
*“I found him whom my soul loves.”* (Song 3:4)  
The separation sets up the emotional power of the reunion in Chapter 12.

- **Background resonance:**  
“Do not awaken love until it pleases.” (Song 2:7; 3:5)  
The pain of separation reveals why love must awaken at the right time.

## How Chapter 11 Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 envisions a king who:

- endures pressure without losing integrity
- resists unjust constraints
- listens to the cries of the afflicted
- remains steadfast in compassion
- rules with patience and righteousness

In Chapter 11, Solomon experiences the kind of suffering that shapes a just king. He is confined, silenced, and restrained by political fear — a taste of the oppression he will one day be called to resist on behalf of others. His longing for Shulamit becomes a school of empathy: he learns what it feels like to be powerless, unheard, and trapped by unjust decree. His whispered promise — “I will find you” — is the seed of the steadfastness Psalm 72 celebrates. This chapter shows that Solomon’s path to righteous kingship is not forged in triumph but in longing, loss, and the refusal to let fear or manipulation define his future. His love for Shulamit becomes the crucible in which his compassion and resolve are refined.

# Chapter 12

Chapter 12 is the emotional climax of the novella — the moment when longing, fear, and separation resolve into fierce, covenantal love. Shulamit, unable to bear the silence, leaves the vineyard before dawn and walks toward Jerusalem with nothing but a letter and a trembling hope. At the same hour, Solomon slips past the palace guards, defying the decree that sought to imprison him. They meet on the road between their worlds, running toward each other with a desperation that breaks into joy. Their reunion is raw, breathless, and transformative: they speak the truth of their love openly, choosing one another not in secrecy but in the light. This chapter is the turning point where their love becomes unshakeable — not fragile longing, but chosen devotion.

## How Chapter 12 Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

Chapter 12 narrates the Song’s **finding** passages with full emotional force. The poem’s line — “I found him whom my soul loves” — becomes literal in their meeting on the road, where both lovers run toward each other with trembling relief. The Song’s imagery of movement, pursuit, and mutual desire is embodied in Shulamit’s journey and Solomon’s escape. The chapter also honors the poem’s theme of **mutual seeking**: in the Song, the woman searches for the man; here, both search for each other, revealing the reciprocity that defines their relationship. The emotional world of the poem — longing, fear, joy, and the fierce relief of reunion — becomes flesh in this chapter. It is the narrative explanation for why the Song’s love is so confident, so bold, so unashamed.

## Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Directly embodied:**  
“I found him whom my soul loves.” (Song 3:4)  
Their meeting on the road is the narrative form of this moment.
- **Implied strongly:**  
“I sought him, but found him not.” (Song 3:1–2)  
Shulamit’s journey begins in the ache of absence.
- **Echoed in tone:**  
“My beloved is mine, and I am his.” (Song 2:16)  
Their mutual choosing in the light foreshadows this declaration.
- **Foreshadowed:**  
“Set me as a seal upon your heart.” (Song 8:6)  
Their covenantal resolve anticipates the poem’s final vow.
- **Background resonance:**  
“Who is this coming up from the wilderness...?” (Song 3:6)  
Their meeting on the road hints at the procession to come.

## How Chapter 12 Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 envisions a king who:

- resists unjust constraints
- listens to truth
- acts with courage
- protects the vulnerable
- rules with steadfast love

In Chapter 12, Solomon embodies these qualities by defying a decree rooted in fear and manipulation. His escape from the palace is not rebellion for its own sake — it is the act of a man refusing to let injustice define his life or his future. His reunion with Shulamit reveals a heart shaped by compassion, humility, and truth. Her courage calls forth his own; her clarity becomes his compass. This chapter shows Solomon becoming the kind of king who will one day pray for righteousness and justice — not because he was trained to, but because love has reshaped his character from the inside out.

## **The “Center” and C.S. Lewis’s *Men Without Chests***

When Solomon says that something in him has “changed at the center,” the line carries a quiet resonance with C.S. Lewis’s critique in *The Abolition of Man* — that modern people risk becoming “men without chests,” beings whose intellect and appetites are intact but whose moral center, the seat of rightly ordered affections, has collapsed. Solomon’s transformation in this chapter is the opposite of that collapse. His “center” awakens — not his ambition, not his desire, but his *affections ordered toward truth*. Shulamit’s love does not weaken him; it restores the part of him that can discern good from evil, courage from fear, calling from convenience. In Lewis’s terms, Solomon becomes a man with a chest — a man whose emotions are trained by truth, whose loves are aligned with righteousness, whose heart is strong enough to bear the weight of kingship. This is why the court fears him. This is why Shulamit trusts him. And this is why he will one day pray Psalm 72 with integrity.

# Chapter 13

Chapter 13 is the moment when the private love between Solomon and Shulamit enters the realm of kingship, legacy, and blessing. David summons Solomon at dusk and listens as his son speaks honestly about the woman who steadies him. The court's fear, Absalom's whispers, and Bathsheba's anxieties all form the backdrop, but David cuts through the noise with the clarity of a man who has lived long enough to know what truly shapes a king. In a moment of profound vulnerability, David recalls Abigail — the woman whose courage and truth once saved him from becoming a worse man. Recognizing the same wisdom in Shulamit, David blesses the union and commands Solomon to bring her to him. This chapter marks the turning point where love becomes not only personal but royal, not only emotional but covenantal, not only desired but affirmed.

## How Chapter 13 Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

The Song of Songs contains a recurring chorus of communal recognition — moments when the “daughters of Jerusalem” or the people of the city witness the lovers and respond. Chapter 13 narrates the *royal* version of that recognition. David becomes the wise elder who sees what the court cannot: that Shulamit's love is not a threat to the kingdom but its renewal. The Song's imagery of the beloved “coming up from the wilderness” (3:6) is echoed here in David's anticipation of meeting her. The poem's celebration of mutual devotion finds its narrative counterpart in David's blessing — a communal affirmation that their love is not merely private passion but a force that will shape Israel's future. This chapter gives the Song's communal chorus a face, a voice, and a history.

## Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Implied strongly:**  
“*Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?*” (Song 8:5)  
David's desire to see Shulamit anticipates the public recognition of their union.
- **Echoed in tone:**  
“*The daughters of Jerusalem... we will rejoice and be glad in you.*” (Song 1:4)  
David's blessing is the royal version of communal affirmation.
- **Foreshadowed:**  
“*Set me as a seal upon your heart.*” (Song 8:6)  
David's recognition of their covenantal love prepares the way for the wedding vows.
- **Background resonance:**  
“*My mother's sons were angry with me...*” (Song 1:6)  
The court's hostility toward Shulamit echoes the poem's social tension.

## How Chapter 13 Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 envisions a king who:

- rules with righteousness
- listens to wise counsel
- protects the vulnerable
- resists corrupt influence
- embodies compassion and justice

In Chapter 13, Solomon receives the kind of blessing that forms such a king. David's invocation of Abigail is crucial: she represents the tradition of wise women who call kings to righteousness. By recognizing Shulamit as part of that lineage, David affirms that Solomon's transformation is not a distraction from kingship but its foundation. Solomon's willingness to speak honestly, to resist fear, and to let love shape his moral center reveals the heart of a future Psalm 72 king. David's blessing becomes the generational handoff — not of power, but of *wisdom*, the very thing Solomon will one day ask God for.

## **The Abigail Connection — Why It Matters Theologically and Narratively**

David's line — *“Only one ever stopped me from becoming a worse man than I was”* — is the emotional and moral core of the chapter. Abigail is the biblical archetype of the wise woman who confronts a future king with truth, courage, and moral clarity. By invoking her, David:

- acknowledges his own failures with humility
- honors the woman who once saved him from bloodshed
- recognizes Shulamit as a woman of the same spirit
- affirms that righteous kingship is shaped by wise, truth-speaking women
- blesses Solomon's transformation as good, godly, and necessary

This connection deepens the entire novella. It places Shulamit in a lineage of women who shape Israel's kings not through seduction or politics, but through wisdom, courage, and truth. It also reinforces the theme that **love, rightly ordered, is not a distraction from calling but the furnace in which calling is refined.**

# Chapter 14

Chapter 14 is the moment when private love becomes public covenant. Shulamit enters the palace not as a political pawn but as a woman of wisdom, dignity, and truth — and the court falls silent before her presence. David, seeing in her the same courage and clarity that once belonged to Abigail, blesses the union with the authority of a king and the tenderness of a father. Solomon and Shulamit exchange vows rooted in the Song’s language of mutual devotion, sealing their love not with spectacle but with truth spoken in the light. The wedding becomes a turning point for the kingdom: a new kind of royal union, grounded not in alliance or ambition but in righteousness, mutuality, and the fierce love that has shaped them both.

## How Chapter 14 Implements the Story Behind the Song of Songs

This chapter is the narrative embodiment of the Song’s **wedding procession** and **public celebration**:

- The court’s hush echoes the poem’s awe:  
*“Who is this coming up from the wilderness...?”* (Song 3:6)
- Shulamit’s simple, radiant beauty mirrors the poem’s imagery of natural adornment — blossoms, vines, pomegranates — rather than royal excess.
- The vows draw directly from the Song’s climactic lines:  
*“Set me as a seal upon your heart...”* (Song 8:6)  
*“For love is strong as death...”* (Song 8:6)
- The communal joy — music, dancing, celebration — reflects the poem’s chorus of rejoicing voices.

But more importantly, the chapter captures the Song’s **theological center**:

Love is not fragile.

Love is not secret.

Love is not shameful.

Love is covenantal, fierce, and public.

The Song’s emotional arc — longing, searching, finding, sealing — reaches its narrative fulfillment here.

## Song of Songs Passages Quoted or Implied

- **Directly quoted:**  
*“Set me as a seal upon your heart...”* (Song 8:6)  
*“For love is strong as death...”* (Song 8:6)
- **Implied strongly:**  
*“Who is this coming up from the wilderness...?”* (Song 3:6)  
Shulamit’s entrance into the palace echoes this moment of public recognition.

- **Echoed in tone:**  
*“We will rejoice and be glad in you.”* (Song 1:4)  
 The communal celebration mirrors this chorus.
- **Foreshadowed earlier, fulfilled here:**  
*“My beloved is mine, and I am his.”* (Song 2:16)  
 Their vows make this mutual belonging explicit.
- **Background resonance:**  
*“The king has brought me into his chambers.”* (Song 1:4)  
 Shulamit’s entrance into the palace fulfills this poetic image.

## How Chapter 14 Shapes Solomon Toward Psalm 72

Psalm 72 describes a king who:

- rules with righteousness
- defends the poor
- listens to truth
- embodies compassion
- brings flourishing to the land

Chapter 14 shows Solomon stepping into that calling with a heart shaped by love, humility, and wisdom.

Here’s how:

### 1. He chooses truth over politics.

His marriage is not a strategic alliance but a covenant rooted in righteousness.

### 2. He honors the wisdom of women.

By receiving David’s Abigail-blessing and recognizing Shulamit’s clarity, he becomes the kind of king who listens to truth wherever it comes from.

### 3. He stands firm against fear.

The court’s resistance no longer shakes him; his center is steady.

### 4. He embraces mutuality.

Psalm 72’s justice flows from a king whose heart is rightly ordered — and Shulamit has helped order his.

### 5. He enters kingship not alone, but partnered.

The psalm's vision of flourishing is communal; Solomon's marriage becomes the first act of that communal righteousness.

In short:

**Chapter 14 is where Solomon becomes the kind of man who can pray Psalm 72 with integrity.**

## **The Abigail Thread — Why It Matters Here**

David's invocation of Abigail in Chapter 13 sets the stage for Chapter 14's emotional power.

By the time Shulamit enters the palace:

- she is not merely a bride
- she is the heir to a lineage of wise women
- she is the one who steadies a king
- she is the one who speaks truth with courage
- she is the one who calls forth righteousness

This makes the wedding not just romantic but **theological**.

It is the moment when:

- the wisdom of Abigail
- the courage of Shulamit
- the blessing of David
- the longing of the Song
- the justice of Psalm 72

all converge.

The wedding is not the end of the story — it is the beginning of Solomon's kingship as it *ought* to be.