



**a SCEPTER,
a SWORD,
a SCENTED
ROSE**

Written by Thom Duncan



Newport, Maine

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A SCEPTRE, A SWORD, A SCENTED ROSE

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A SCEPTRE, A SWORD, A SCENTED ROSE

CAST OF CHARACTERS

14M 3W + extras

LAMONI -- Lamanite King of the Land of Ishmael

SEPHARIAH -- Lamoni's wife

ANTIHAMNAH -- SEPHARIAH'S uncle and High Priest of Nehor

AMMON -- Nephite son to King Mosiah of the Land of Zarahemla

AARON -- AMMON'S brother

OMNER -- AMMON'S brother

HIMNI -- AMMON'S brother

ABISH -- female servant to Queen SEPHARIAH

ZEPHONIA -- daughter to LAMONI and SEPHARIAH

JAKOR -- physician to LAMONI'S court

MORIAMI -- ABISH'S aged father

CORIOMRON -- Captain of the Guards in LAMONI'S court

ELAM -- LAMONI'S servant

TWO GUARDS

TWO SHEPHERDS

SUBJECTS

SERVANTS

The action of the play occurs during the reign of King Lamoni over the Land of Ishmael, about 90 B.C. in the King's palace and neighboring areas. Action is meant to be continuous.

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14M 3W (6M with doubling and tripling of roles) + guards, servants, subjects.

Unit Set.

2hrs.

Order # 2015

This play was selected as a representative of the finest in Mormon dramaturgy at the 1973 Mormon Festival of the Arts at BYU. It is a powerful drama based on the story of Ammon and King Lamoni as recounted in ALMA 17-19. Ammon, a Nephite son of King Mosiah, ventures into the Land Of Ishmael on missionary endeavors. He's captured and brought before the wicked Lamanite vassal King, Lamoni, who is enthralled by this Nephite's courage and strength. Lamoni keeps Ammon as one of his servants, soon promoting him to his private man. Lamoni's conversion to the True Gospel is the climax to this suspenseful play, with eloquent and demanding dialogue and characterization.

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SETTING: *The stage is black. There is a FLASH OF LIGHT in one section of the stage; a candle being lit. A pause. Another flash of light and another candle, and so on until four candles are burning equidistant from each other, forming a square, slanting away from the audience. Now they give off enough light that it can be vaguely discerned that the four candles are on the four corners of a raked platform, on which lays an unconscious man, LAMONI, KING OF ISHMAEL (or at least the representation of same).*

SEPHARIAH, Lamoni's wife, and ZEPHONIA, their daughter, stand off a little ways, watching. ANTIHAMNAH, HIGH PRIEST OF NEHOR spurns the whole event by turning his back to the ceremony. ABISH, the Queen's SERVANT GIRL stands at another corner next to AMMON, son of MOSIAH. Elsewhere in the room are CORIOMRON, CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS and the GUARDS, ELAM, the King's manservant, and various other court people.

AT RISE: *JAKOR, the COURT PHYSICIAN, who is the one who has lighted the candles, now moves to Lamoni's head. He is darkly robed, his head covered. He picks up an incense burner, raises it high above and, accompanied by unintelligible words and the monotonous beating of a drum rendered by Jakor's ASSISTANT, Jakor causes it to swing around Lamoni's head. Then he places it down at Lamoni's feet and removes a bell which he rings and places at Lamoni's head. Then Jakor removes a metal charm suspended from a chain and begins to swing it slowly, all the while uttering the words and accompanied by the drum.*

The swinging takes a wider arc, the words come faster, the beating speeds up, the tempo increases until Jakor is whipping the charm about his head, the beating frenetic. Abruptly, and perfectly timed, he stops, the drum stops. Jakor stands slightly bent forward, looking at Lamoni, who doesn't move. Angrily, Jakor goes about snuffing out all the candles, pocketing his paraphernalia, and pulling off his hood, all of which he tosses to the Assistant, who runs off. Jakor turns to Sephariah.

JAKOR: Two days he has not stirred. Every manner of rite brought into practice, and yet he lies motionless.

My Queen, I regret my abilities include not the raising of the dead.

SEPHARIAH: He is not dead.

ANTIHAMNAH: So says Ammon.

[Ammon turns, casts an unwavering glance at Antihamnah, who turns away.]

JAKOR: His body begins to rot. To the sepulcher with him!

SEPHARIAH: The sepulcher is for the dead only! Look, Jakor, a faint color in his cheeks!

JAKOR: These are not the words of reason! You will sit there until his body crumbles away, then, with his deathdust falling about your ankles, you will yet maintain that he lives! Let him lie!

SEPHARIAH: When he is as cold as the earth, and not before!

JAKOR: You see before you a life-drawn form that has breath only in your imaginings.

SEPHARIAH: But -- feel him! The warmth of life!

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JAKOR: I cannot bring again strength to these sagging sinews.

[He holds up Lamoni's arm, lets it fall.]

SEPHARIAH: Look! His eyes move beneath his lids!

AMMON: He sleeps in the Lord. Those events which brought him to his present condition are what now he sees...

[LIGHTS fade on this group, coming up on another part of the stage. Jakor moves down from the platform as the real Lamoni enters from offstage.]

LAMONI: What is it, Jakor?

JAKOR: The Queen Sephariah came to me this morning in a somewhat agitated state of mind and remained that way for several moments. When I was finally able to calm her sufficiently, she began to lay before me the resume of your seemingly inexplicable actions of late, whereupon I promptly came to you to conclude for myself and discover that her most feared intuitions are true. The King is indeed ill.

LAMONI: And what is his ailment, physician?

JAKOR: Were the King to answer my questions, I could --

LAMONI: Very well, ask your questions.

JAKOR: How long have you been suffering from such spells?

LAMONI: Spells? Spells? What spells?

JAKOR: These... er... moments when your awareness takes wings --figuratively speaking, of course -- and flies from you like a bird from its nest.

LAMONI: That is impossible to answer since, my awareness having taken wings figuratively speaking, of course -- and flying from me like a bird, etcetera -- I am unaware that they occur.

JAKOR: Seven days, the Queen says.

LAMONI: Then I have suffered from these spells since seven days!

JAKOR: Perhaps the King is not concerned over his condition, but, as physician to the court, I must needs inquire.

LAMONI: Then go and inquire of the Queen, who seems to know more about my condition than either one of us!

JAKOR: (*Dauntless, ever dauntless*) Has the King noticed a failing of his strength -- any matter of vertigo?

LAMONI: Jakor, I fear the Queen, however pure her motives may appear, has misinformed you.

JAKOR: Would that I be the judge of that. After all, it is my responsibility, my necessary function.

LAMONI: I've got it! Sephariah has conspired with you to prove me a fool! Oh, what a bothersome woman, living from one day to the next to make my life insufferable!

JAKOR: I sensed grave concern in her tones.

LAMONI: One of her favorite tricks. In one breath, she is the perfect picture of sincerity, an image imposed for us that she might gain her own ends! She has not a heart within her bosom, but a stone.

JAKOR: Have there been times when --

LAMONI: Jakor, I see not the point behind this interrogation.

JAKOR: (*Hurt*) Unfortunate. Truly unfortunate. I seek only your improved health.

LAMONI: (*Tired*) And for what reason? That you may prescribe what you always prescribe -- a lifeless metal charm placed around the neck, a seasoning of senseless terms sprinkled about my ears? Look at me, Jakor! Is this the body of an ill man? Notice with what ease I move about! There are many close to me in years and

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even younger whose shriveled legs can barely keep them from faltering! Still power in these bones! And do not forget that the King you see before you goes into battle with his army behind him. I am much known for my fierceness in combat; the land is laden yet with the bodies of those I have felled with my own sword! Are these the doings of a man in need of a physician? Jakor, I think you would better use your time to consult the books and relearn your art.

[LIGHTS up on Ammon, coming down from platform.]

Ammon, what are you doing here?

[Lamoni and Jakor FREEZE. On another part of the stage, the loud but not angry VOICES of OMNER and HIMNI are heard as they ENTER. AARON ENTERS carrying bows and arrows. All appear in a jovial mood, except Ammon, who watches the following action strangely aloof.]

OMNER: I beg to differ, dear brother! But it was who missed, not I!

HIMNI: I, Omner? You know I've never missed a target in all my life!

OMNER: You missed one this time! I saw it!

HIMNI: Therein lies your mistake, in thinking I was aiming at the rabbit. My target was, indeed, the tree behind it!

AARON: Now our younger brother has taken up shooting at trees!

HIMNI: Well, does not Father always tell us to practice every chance, so as not to lose our skill?

OMNER: Himni!

HIMNI: Omner!

[They embrace each other, laughing.]

OMNER: Himni, you go further than anyone I know before admitting you're wrong!

HIMNI: It's because I'm so seldom wrong I forget how to admit it.

AARON: Ammon, are you also overcome by Himni's humility?

AMMON: *(Half-hearted)* Yea, verily.

HIMNI: Where are we, Ammon?

AMMON: Ishmael lies a week's Journey beyond that ridge.

OMNER: Ishmael. Lamoni is their King.

HIMNI: Within the borders of the Lamanites? Is it wise to lay down our bows?

AARON: Calm yourself, Himni. Do you see any Lamanites?

HIMNI: You know how many times Father has told us of their cunning and disguises!

OMNER: Be still, Himni! -- that bush behind you -- !

[Himni whirls, bow poised. Others laugh. Himni walks away from the group.]

I have offended you. I am sorry.

[Himni, after a moment, smiles and takes Omner's outstretched arm.]

AARON: Ammon? Do you find our joviality distasteful?

AMMON: *(Feigning indigestion)* It's the venison you roasted yesterday.

HIMNI: Had it been my bow that brought it down, perhaps it would have stayed dead!

OMNER: As dead as a tree?

[Himni and Omner begin to wrestle. A moment, then they all FREEZE. Lamoni is silent, watching the brothers. He looks about suddenly, as if hearing voices.]

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LAMONI: What?

JAKOR: I said nothing, my --

LAMONI: (*Whirling*) Nay!

(*Pause; he listens*) Nay!

JAKOR: My King?

LAMONI: (*Calm for a moment*) Yes?

JAKOR: Your eyes -- they look in my direction, but they see beyond me.

LAMONI: (*Abrupt*) Nay!

[*He stares at JAKOR.*]

Did you move?

JAKOR: Not a jot, my sovereign.

LAMONI: DID YOU MOVE?

JAKOR: I have remained in this position since first I entered!

LAMONI: (*More to himself than to Jakor*) What moved? I saw it move.

JAKOR: There is nothing --

LAMONI: Contradict me not, Jakor! I know what I see!

JAKOR: Yes, of course. As you wish, my Lord!

[*Lamoni points to Ammon and his brothers.*]

LAMONI: There! There it is! Another one! Three! Four! Do you not see, Jakor?

JAKOR: See? Yes, I see -- I see --

LAMONI: (*To the air*) Not -- I! I -- am -- KING!

[*He becomes unintelligible, emitting strange guttural sounds.*]

JAKOR: What is it, Great Lamoni?

[*Lamoni draws his sword.*]

LAMONI: Back! I won't --!

[*He brandishes his sword at invisible attackers.*]

Guards! Guards!

[*Immediately, the GUARDS enter; they're confused, frustrated at the sight of their raving king.*]

Nay! Nay!

[*Lamoni lurches up onto his toes, drops his sword, and lets out a large cry, as though all the energy in his body is flowing out. He totters for a moment, then starts to fall forward. Jakor rushes to catch him.*]

JAKOR: (*To Guards*) Help me!

[*Guards assist Jakor in carrying Lamoni to the throne.*]

JAKOR: A king's wandering mind.

[*He pulls from his cloak an ornately decorated bell, that, he begins to ring over Lamoni's head.*]

(*To Guards*) You may go.

[*Lamoni looks up, sees Ammon.*]

LAMONI: Ammon? Are you back again? Do you torment me in my sleep, as well?

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[Ammon and brothers become animate again.]

AARON: *(Seeing the grave look on Ammon's face)* I have often seen that look on Father's face... When was it?

AMMON: The night just passed.

AARON: At last! Omner! Himni! Ammon has spoken with the Lord!

[They stop wrestling and hurry and gather around.]

AMMON: Last night, Ammon was speaking with the Lord!

HIMNI: Last night? Why have you waited so long to tell us?

OMNER: Because the Lord is displeased with our efforts?

AMMON: Nay... not that.

OMNER: What could he have said that you should wear such a long face?

AMMON: Something I had never supposed... I know not how to express it...

HIMNI: Fret not, Ammon. Were it a command that we go upon the Lamanites, we four against their entire armies, it would be possible with you to lead us!

OMNER: Brave words come easy to you now!

AARON: No time for playful bantering. Ammon?

AMMON: *(Hesitating)* Have we not shared many good times?

AARON: Yea, Ammon. Times of peace, and times of torment.

AMMON: I know I will never forget them... Strange, is it not? I have preached roaring words from every wall in all the cities of the land yet I falter... fumbling over myself to speak with my brothers.... After the sun had set on our camp, I arose, went off by myself, down near the river where we had gathered our water.... There, the Lord came unto me...

AARON: His words! What were his words?

AMMON: He desires... that we separate.

HIMNI: Separate?

OMNER: No need for fear, Himni!

HIMNI: I fear nothing! It's only... we've been together in all our travels --

AARON: Let Ammon finish!

AMMON: We are to go, one by one, into the Lands of the Lamanites.

[They FREEZE. LAMONI closes his eyes.]

LAMONI: *(Almost inaudible)* Did I say something?

JAKOR: You spoke wildly, as though the room were filled with assailants.

LAMONI: Yes... that.

JAKOR: You drew your sword and were beginning to fend them off when you succumbed... My incantations brought you back.

LAMONI: Incantations? Is that what you call the sounding of that bell?

JAKOR: Who are these attackers that you envision?

LAMONI: I know not. Their faces are hidden from me.

JAKOR: This thing has happened often.

LAMONI: This entire week past, before we began preparations for the journey to Olgatha... Then there were dreams.

JAKOR: Dreams?

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LAMONI: In the which I am assaulted by visions of bloody warriors. Never do I see their faces, only their ripped and bleeding flesh, arms raised, swords raised, against me... Indescribable sounds of demons from mouths that are invisible. There are hordes of them and always, always, I am alone, defenseless... Their swords slice across my body, their spears enter my side, but from me no blood flows! They curse, they jeer, their voices raised in mockery against me, until there arises such a cacophony...! Then, where before the horizon was full of brandished swords... nothing.

[The brothers become animate again.]

HIMNI: We are to go our separate ways? But where?

[Lamoni watches the scene.]

LAMONI: Himni, tell your brother Ammon to let me rise!

[Himni, of course, doesn't hear.]

AMMON: That is between you and the Lord.

HIMNI: But are we prepared enough to go alone? The land is rife with robbers!

OMNER: Brandish your bow at them and they will scatter like flies from a horse's back!

AARON: The Lord has given Ammon as our leader; his words are the words of God. That is sufficient unto me!

OMNER: And me!

[They all look at Himni.]

HIMNI: I could always pull my cloak tighter, if the weather worsened; my quiver is packed with enough arrows to take on a fair attack, and, with my bow...

[Another pause. He looks up and smiles.]

... No tree in all the land dare offend me!

[Laughter, slapping each other's backs.]

AMMON: A long time apart, only to be brought together again when our work is done.

HIMNI: But think of the adventures we will tell!

AMMON: Let us divide the meat and provisions here.

HIMNI: So soon?

OMNER: And why not? The better for you. If we wait, you will have one less adventure to brag about!

[They divide the contents of their packs.]

AMMON: There. Enough for seven days.

HIMNI: And after that?

OMNER: If you go hungry, try eating the meat of a tree.

[Aaron looks down at the Land of Ishmael. Staging should favor LAMONI.]

A wicked land, the Land of Ishmael. They are a hardened, ferocious people, who delight in murdering the Nephites. They drink the blood of their victims in golden goblets. It will be a great task, Ammon.

AMMON: Remember the words of Nephi: "I will go and do the things which my father commands for I know that the Lord will give no commandment unless he provide a way to accomplish it." There was a time when the names of the sons of Mosiah were uttered in the same dread as those of the Lamanites, and yet here we are, preparing to go and do the very thing we one time fought against.

HIMNI: The Land of Ishmael wicked? Nothing compared to where the Lord will send me!

OMNER: And where is that, my courageous brother?

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HIMNI: It's between the Lord and me.

AMMON: To work all the days of our lives to bring souls unto him would not be sufficient to rid our garments of the shame we brought the Church... the skies grow dark; we must take leave.

OMNER: *(To Himni)* Crooked bow and all -- nonetheless, I shall miss you.

HIMNI: But who will wrestle with me?

OMNER: Who does now? I only toy with you!

[They laugh.]

HIMNI: Ammon -- though I have much confidence -- I would not that you mistake my meaning! Before we depart, perhaps you could... now it is I who fumble over my words!

AMMON: I know your meaning.

[They all kneel.]

Lord God Omnipotent; it is with great joy that we kneel before thee this day to give thee thanks for our bounteous blessings, for having brought us back from the depths of sin and despair unto great joy. We ask thee to go with us as we travel our separate ways, which thing is in accordance with thy will. Be with Aaron, that many will be converted through his ministry and that he will seek thee daily in supplication. Be thou also with Omner; comfort him and may he always feel thy guiding hand in his life. And be with Himni in his youth, that he will be dedicated to this work and free from discouragement. And, Father, we pray that, if thou desirest, we may be reunited when our mission is complete. Amen.

LAMONI: That was when the visions started! It was because of you, Ammon! You brought them to me!

AARON: Good-bye my brothers.

[EXITS swiftly.]

HIMNI: He is anxious to go!

OMNER: I go, too, into the wilderness.

[Smiles, EXITS.]

HIMNI: And now... Ammon?

AMMON: Yes.

HIMNI: Now only you and I...

AMMON: *(Teasing)* And the rocks beneath our feet, and the barren mountains...

HIMNI: When the Lord speaks -- what's it like? So when he speaks to me, I will know.

AMMON: For a moment, nothing, then a warmth, like no other, a warmth of... of knowing.

HIMNI: Simple, is it not?

AMMON: Your trusty bow. Here.

[Himni slowly reaches out and takes it. A pause. He looks at Ammon, who reaches out, grabs him by the shoulders. They smile. Himni turns and EXITS, running. A pause. Ammon picks up his gear, looks once at the Land of Ishmael, then EXITS. LIGHTS down on the brothers.]

AMMON'S VOICE: He sleeps in the Lord. The events which brought him to this state are what now he sees.

LAMONI: What? Who is that who speaks?

[Jakor leaves, going back up to position on platform, as Coriomron and Guards take Ammon and all descend from platform to area of King's vision. The Guards are having a difficult time bringing Ammon in, for he protests wildly, himself alone nearly the match

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for the two of them.]

LAMONI: What is this? Why is he brought here?

(To himself) Ah! Now I remember. This is the first I ever saw of you Ammon, the mighty Nephite.

[Ammon, who had been pushed to his knees before Lamoni's feet, now surges up suddenly, catching one of the FIRST GUARD unawares, knocking him over. The SECOND GUARD strikes Ammon across the back in an attempt to bring him down, but to no avail; Ammon turns and picks up Second Guard over his shoulder. First Guard has by now regained his balance and jumps on Ammon, joined by Coriomron.]

CORIOMRON: *(To First Guard)* Watch him, fool!

LAMONI: Guards, hold him!

CORIOMRON: He's attacking the King!

LAMONI: Keep him from me!

[The Two Guards and Coriomron manage to force Ammon to his back, one of the Guards holding a spear to his throat. Ammon at last lies motionless, breathing heavily. A wry smile twists across Lamoni's face.]

A strong one, he.

CORIOMRON: We saw him scaling the wall of the city. He out-ran six of my guards before we captured him, then it took six again to bring him down. He has the strength for ten more.

LAMONI: *(Intrigued)* Why does he so vigorously withstand capture? A spy?

CORIOMRON: That is what we suppose.

LAMONI: Then the Nephites are planning to go to war again. Quite a battle must be in store if they send spies such as this.

[He looks into Ammon's eyes.]

You seem not as strong now, cowering there at my feet, yet you must know that death lingers but moments away.

[Lamoni is magnetically held by Ammon's gaze. Pause.]

CORIOMRON: What is to be done with him?

LAMONI: *(From afar)* Hmm? What?

CORIOMRON: What would you that we do to the Nephite?

LAMONI: *(A pause. Then he breaks)* Interrogation... discover their plans... Take him and torture him and bring him back to me with the interpreter. I will question him then.

[Guards move to grasp Ammon, but he breaks free, and prostrates himself before Lamoni's feet.]

AMMON: King Lamoni, I must be heard!

CORIOMRON: Seize him!

[An outstretched hand from Lamoni brings the Guards to an abrupt halt.]

LAMONI: Hold! Let him be as he is.

CORIOMRON: This man is a danger to the King!

AMMON: I will not attack him! I want only to be heard!

LAMONI: You speak our language well, Nephite.

AMMON: I have studied it from time to time.

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LAMONI: You have had previous contact with our people?

AMMON: If it please the King, I came not here to answer questions concerning my time nor tongue. My business is of much greater import.

CORIOMRON: Of much greater import, indeed!

AMMON: *(To Lamoni)* My words are with you alone.

LAMONI: *(Angry)* You will speak your words now, before us all, or I will have your life!

AMMON: *(The same)* Think you I fear for my life? I could fight off your guards and twenty more like them!

LAMONI: Enough of this! Take him!

[Guards show reluctance to tangle once again with Ammon, but Coriomron stabs at them with his knife and they move to him. Ammon throws them off easily and they go back for more. Ammon wrests a sword from them and keeps them at bay, dodging their sword thrusts. At an opportune moment, Ammon leaps on Coriomron, draws the latter's knife, holds it to Coriomron's throat.]

AMMON: Call them off!

[Coriomron looks to Lamoni, who stands smiling, genuinely amused.]

LAMONI: Go! Go! Leave us!

[Guards EXIT. Coriomron rises, starts to go. Lamoni to Ammon.]

Without the knife!

[Ammon gives the knife to Coriomron, who EXITS.]

Though I see not what difference it would make. Were my death on your mind, you could easily have it with your bare hands.

[Elam EXITS.]

AMMON: It would have been much easier had you let me speak when first I asked.

LAMONI: Your smugness fascinates me. Truly you must be a man who does not fear for his life.

AMMON: I have discovered there are other, more important things which command fear.

LAMONI: *(Not to be taken in, condescending)* Well, you've gained your audience with the King. Speak quickly! What are you called?

AMMON: Many things: spy, dissenter, strong one, but my name is Ammon.

LAMONI: *(Savoring it)* Ammon.

AMMON: And you're King Lamoni!

LAMONI: This is your talk?

AMMON: Your fame has spread far, even unto the Nephites. It is well known the much good you have done your people, your skill in leading armies. I remember, as a soldier myself, our fear when we learned you were coming against us.

LAMONI: Why were you caught stealing into the city of this famous king?

AMMON: I could not run fast enough to outdistance your guards. Inept though they be in combat, they make interesting runners.

LAMONI: They were no match to you just now, that is assured.

AMMON: I was caught because I wanted to be. Had I walked up the gates of your city and said, "I am a vagabond Nephite. I would that you direct me to the palace of the great King Lamoni," I would have been surely slain before drawing another breath.

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LAMONI: And for what reason, this audience?

AMMON: It was not to spy.

LAMONI: Your smugness is no assurance against dying! State your doings with me or I shall call my entire army to come upon you! And no matter your strength, you cannot combat them all!

AMMON: I ask the King's pardon.

LAMONI: *(Slightly affected by this respect. A pause)* Rise! Rise! Now, reasons!

AMMON: For long years, your name has been held in much fear and dread among my people, on their lips as often as the name of King Mosiah. And never was it mentioned without a reference to your prowess in battle and wisdom in kingship. I have been an incurable worshipper of great men, wherefore I come unto you this day in hopes of finding employment in your palace.

LAMONI: *(Oh, really?)* You startle me.

AMMON: I can work as well as your present servants!

LAMONI: No doubt better! But... a Nephite!

AMMON: Yea, a Nephite! But one who desires to serve a great Lamanite leader!

LAMONI: Since that day when your fathers stole our inheritance, there has never been a Nephite in the court. Those we slay not, we hire out in bondage to the merchants.

AMMON: Does not the King need the services of one who is loyal?

LAMONI: You have Nephite skin, Nephite blood running through your veins, and you have a Nephite heart trained from the womb to be an enemy to my people.

AMMON: King Lamoni does me a great injustice to judge me against my weaker brethren. Were I your enemy, I would have taken your life by now, shackled though I am.

LAMONI: Those are the hands of a man who could serve a great master.

AMMON: Your approbation and these hands are yours.

LAMONI: You're a strange one.

AMMON: If the King declares it, so am I. A dog, if you desire! A wart on the back of your hand -- anything, if you let me serve you!

LAMONI: Words! Words!

[Makes a move to call the Guards.]

AMMON: O, Great and Mighty ruler, hear me further! When the sun is still dark, I will be at your feet, heeding your every wish, and all through the day! I will only close my eyes in sleep when you command it! An arm raised in anger against you will feel my strength first; if a word is said to belittle you, I will replace it with one that demands respect! Whatsoever you desire of me, I shall surely do!

LAMONI: How may I be certain that you would not betray me, slay me some night while I slept?

AMMON: My word that I would not.

LAMONI: Know you what means the word of a Nephite in this court?

AMMON: It is the greatest binding symbol of confidence among my people.

LAMONI: *(Almost giving in)* You're strong. . . I have need of a strong man...

(Regaining control)

Unthinkable!

[Turns away, but something draws him back.]

The eyes of an honest man. The firm jaw of one who would be unwavering in his loyalty. These are the arms

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of a man who has known hard work... Yet the strength, the courage is not all in your stance; there is that... something... which seems incongruent with binding chains. What crime did you commit that you must flee here?

AMMON: None.

LAMONI: And yet you change your nation for mine?

AMMON: I am a Nephite and will remain such.

LAMONI: You declared otherwise: to be one of us.

AMMON: I want to serve you, but I would maintain my traditions.

LAMONI: (*Laughs*) Madness! Extraordinary! You wish to serve me, live in my palace, partake of my food! I'll hear no more of it!

AMMON: What care you to whom I give my oblations, as long as you are served better?

LAMONI: There are laws, traditions. The Order of Nehor is embraced by all who come between these borders.

AMMON: But not by me.

LAMONI: If I command it?

AMMON: Nay!

LAMONI: What's that phrase your people use in referring to us? "Carnal, sensual, and devilish, living after their own lusts." It's true! Though we don't wish to phrase it so. We are an extremely vicious people who are not afflicted with that stifling morality which curses your race. Does it not disturb you to know that you might live amidst such corruption? You would surround yourself with enemies, be scourged, ridiculed, one of us, but not quite, not being able to join in our celebrations? And what celebrations they are! You cannot imagine the Epicurean delights we devise for our amusements! You come not as an awe-struck Nephite to kiss the sandals of the famous king, but to take back your lost brothers. To no avail, for they are not prisoners, but remain here of their own free will.

AMMON: As willing slaves to your merchants?

LAMONI: A note of contempt in your voice? Then you are as the rest of us, with emotions that sometimes soar on their own and sensitivities that feel the prick of scorn! I had begun to think that your soul was as white as you skin... Men Should not be too white for there is that black part in all of us. I am amused by you Nephite. I find enjoyment in you. I had thought that I had bled the world dry of its pleasures, that I would have to escort myself to the grave accompanied by the monotonous strains of a too-used excess, but in you, I find damp earth to plant again my relish for life!

AMMON: Am I to understand that the King will allow me to stay and serve him?

LAMONI: You are to understand that the King could have your life at a moment's notice, but he is permitting you to live that, through your arrogance and disregard for royalty, you might bring brightness to the dusk of his life. Know you aught about horses?

AMMON: I will soon learn.

LAMONI: We are preparing a visit to the Land of Olgatha, where my father has his palace, a boring reunion that fortunately takes place but once a year. You are to prepare sufficient horses to escort myself, the Queen, and several guards. Elam!

[Elam ENTERS, with Guards and Coriomron.]

ELAM: My King!

LAMONI: Ammon, the Nephite!

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ELAM: Master?

LAMONI: *(To Ammon)* Elam who serves me rather well, somewhat slow of wit, but gentle enough. He will take you to Gimhah, my stablemaster, who serves me slowly and with forced dedication.

(To Coriomron) Loose him. I gave an order!

[A pause. Coriomron reluctantly looses Ammon.]

(To Elam) He will be treated as one of you. Now, go!

[Ammon, stopping before the King, bows, then EXITS with Elam.]

CORIOMRON: What does this mean, sire, the loosing of a Nephite?

LAMONI: A giant of a man, don't you think?

CORIOMRON: And because he is, is it wise to do this?

LAMONI: You question the judgment of your King?

CORIOMRON: My Lord, as captain of the guard, I have grave misgivings about the Nephite.

LAMONI: That month you spent in the prison at Zarahemla has made you overly wary.

CORIOMRON: *(At attention)* The King will remember that I alone devised an escape plan and fled with twenty of our men!

LAMONI: *(He's heard it many times)* To which you now owe your position in the court.

CORIOMRON: This man that you have honored with his freedom... he seems familiar to me.

LAMONI: No doubt he was the prison guard who held you captive!

CORIOMRON: Nay, my King! That man, I slew with my own sword!

LAMONI: Coriomron, you have tasks elsewhere?

[A pause. Coriomron turns and goes back up to his first position on the platform. Lamoni remains seated.]

Ah yes, Coriomron, you tried to warn me. Had I but listened to you. I knew not then the hold Ammon had on me.

[LIGHTS up on platform again. Zephonia crosses to Sephariah, places her hands upon her shoulder.]

ZEPHONIA: Mother, perhaps you should rest.

SEPHARIAH: How may I rest until Lamoni moves again?

[They FREEZE. Lamoni looks up at Sephariah.]

LAMONI: Sephariah, it is you who no doubt suffer the most, wondering if life will ever return to my still form.

Yet, I find this affection a strange disguise, for it was not so evident when I first told you of Ammon.

[Sephariah comes down, as LIGHTS down on platform. Lamoni EXITS, then RE-ENTERS, tying his robe. He sees Sephariah, stops. It is obvious her feelings are hurt as she perhaps wipes away a tear. She speaks without turning.]

SEPHARIAH: Why did you laugh?

LAMONI: Did I? I don't remember.

SEPHARIAH: Of late, you don't remember many things.

LAMONI: Oh, yes. I was recalling something which happened earlier today I found amusing.

SEPHARIAH: And you laughed? Have you no more respect for our marriage bed than to --?

LAMONI: Sephariah, no longer are we hot-blooded youths with passion surging in our breasts. To pretend we are is as useless as trying to dig for water in the Land of Desolation. There is pleasure no more. It's an

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ordeal.

SEPHARIAH: You condemn me for something I cannot help?

LAMONI: How many times does this make? Three this week, I believe.

SEPHARIAH: Zephoniah may be our only child.

LAMONI: She is too much like her mother to be my child. How old is she now?

SEPHARIAH: Nineteen.

LAMONI: Nineteen? Time to find her some dim-wit dullard who can marry her and take her away. The sight of her sickens me nearly as much as you do.

SEPHARIAH: I shall need another horse. I am taking Abish to the feast with me.

LAMONI: Why do you not set your mind one time for all?

SEPHARIAH: I will not make the journey to your father's palace without Abish; she must needs bring a change of gown, that I may freshen up.

LAMONI: More is needed than gowns for your beauty.

SEPHARIAH: You chide me for wanting to look pleasant, to impress your father?

LAMONI: To impress my brothers, so that they will covet you, cursing themselves for marrying their wrinkled witches.

SEPHARIAH: You didn't used to mind my looking appealing.

LAMONI: I knew not then what lay within your bosom, that spiteful venom which poisons the desires of the heart.

SEPHARIAH: The horse?

LAMONI: Very well, another horse. But I shall require yet another one, as well.

SEPHARIAH: You?

LAMONI: Yea, for the Nephite shall accompany me.

SEPHARIAH: The Nephite?

LAMONI: His name is Ammon, from no less a place than Zarahemla. I have accepted him in the court.

SEPHARIAH: Lamoni, nay!

LAMONI: He is a diligent worker and he respects me. I have so long time lacked respect, dear wife.

SEPHARIAH: You have no need for more servants.

LAMONI: I have no need to explain myself to you!

SEPHARIAH: A King explains nothing to his wife.

LAMONI: Wife, in name alone. At times I doubt that, since your uncle Antihannah did the rite.

SEPHARIAH: Think upon the implications of such an action! Your people... what will they think?

LAMONI: They will think what I tell them to think. They always have. Sephariah, it has been a long, long time since we explained our doings to one another; no need to begin again.

SEPHARIAH: To the contrary, Lamoni, it is time we discuss certain... happenings of late... those periods when your perception darkens.

LAMONI: Nothing would cause you greater joy than to know this hoary head were empty as a withered gourd! Since that first day when I was beguiled into sharing my life with you, you have questioned everything. Every royal action I take you rebel against it. You are best to have been wife only to me; not dissenting, measuring my qualifications, ceaseless prolonger of my pain! Were it within my power, Woman, I would end our union!

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SEPHARIAH: But you fear reprimands from my uncle.

(Softening) You once cared for me.

LAMONI: *(This is true, but he won't admit it)* Out of circumstances, not love.

SEPHARIAH: *(Tender)* What moves you, Lamoni?

LAMONI: I have grown accustomed to this bleakness. My senses having been dulled, I found you now only barely convenient. And what is wrong with your senses? There were times you could tell my troubles, merely at a glance.

[He looks at her, but she is silent.]

There, you see? It is not I alone but the both of us!

[A pause. She turns and walks to another section of the stage, beginning to brush her hair.]

LAMONI: As you walked away, there was something in me, almost forcing me to call you back. A seed of something I had not felt in such a long while but which I would feel many more times. But I did not.

(A pause)

I remember thinking what it was went through your head, wondering why I had said I did, myself wondering the same. Then, I could not hear your thoughts. Tell, Sephariah, what vengeful desires had I implanted?

SEPHARIAH: Abish! Abish!

[ABISH ENTERS carrying some gowns.]

ABISH: Yes, my lady?

SEPHARIAH: This gown is sticking me! Fix it!

ABISH: I see no pin.

SEPHARIAH: It's sticking me, I tell you! Find it!

ABISH: Now I see it. But the Queen must not move.

SEPHARIAH: Pull it out!

ABISH: There! I have it!

SEPHARIAH: I have spoken with the King. Your mare is being prepared.

ABISH: Very well.

SEPHARIAH: Which gowns are we taking?

ABISH: I had thought perhaps these.

SEPHARIAH: They will do... but you have failed to pack my favorite, the violet satin with roses.

ABISH: I am repairing it. It will be ready in time for the journey. Shall I pack them?

SEPHARIAH: Of course, you shall pack them! How do you suppose I carry them otherwise?

[Abish bows, starts to EXIT.]

ABISH: As you wish, my Queen.

SEPHARIAH: Abish, dear Abish. You will not allow me to be angry with you. The more I lash out, the gentler you become and my anger ebbs.

ABISH: I wish only to keep my Queen happy.

SEPHARIAH: I would that you teach your ways to the King, for he has not made me happy this long while.

Do you know what he has done now? He has taken a Nephite as his servant.

ABISH: A Nephite, my lady?

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SEPHARIAH: From Zarahemla My name will be had for mockery in all the land for allowing him to do it! Even now, I can hear the words of belittlement that will come against me at the feast: "Sephariah, are you losing you hand over Lamoni? He no longer comes panting to your side when you roll your eyes?" I will not give those jealous wives the satisfaction of gloating in my failures!

ABISH: The King must have a worthy motive, for doing this thing.

SEPHARIAH: It is well that you are so convinced of my husband's honorable doings!

ABISH: I meant no implication that you do not understand him.

SEPHARIAH: Meant or no, it's true; Lamoni has become a stranger to me.

ABISH: Does not a King have many things to ponder in his mind?

SEPHARIAH: Indeed! But have you noticed the many times he sits, either talking to himself or saying nothing? These seven days past, he has worsened. And then, of a sudden, when he flares up, lamenting and moaning, and bewailing his fate, making such hideous sounds I cannot bear to listen! When he is himself again I confront him with what I have seen and he denies it, saying I have invented it to spite him...! Oh, Abish, how I long for days gone by, when Lamoni and his Queen were first wed, when their love was barely blooming... Now, the blossom has withered, the petals have fallen to dust, and the whole of it is blown away by the winds of discontent... Could I but recapture that early bliss, somehow remove the years. But no monarch, regardless of the vastness of his empire, has the power to alter what time has wrought.

ABISH: Time is verily the King of us all, my Queen.

SEPHARIAH: I have withstood his ramblings, his upheavals, his casting aside of my efforts to help him, his -- amusements -- but this I will not endure! There must be a way whereby I may undo his consent to this man, Ammon, bring disfavor to him that Lamoni will see his error.-- Go! Pack away the gowns! Make ready!

[Abish EXITS. Sephariah FREEZES.]

LAMONI: How similar were my thoughts then, to yours. But there is something about the crown of a King that keeps his thoughts prisoner within his head, as his robes make captive his heart's desires, and I remained silent.

[LIGHTS come up on Abish, approaching an OLD MAN who is asleep, MORIAMI.]

ABISH: Father! Father!

LAMONI: Abish! What have you to do with this story of a King's fall?

ABISH: Father!

MORIAMI: *(Coming awake)* No, No! Just resting!

ABISH: Can you not stay awake for a few moments? I leave the room long enough to fetch your dinner and come back to find you slumbering!

MORIAMI: I was not asleep.

ABISH: Here's your dinner.

MORIAMI: Old people must rest a great deal. They are not abounding in energy as are the young.

(Sniffs food)

What is it?

ABISH: Eat it all.

MORIAMI: If I do not like it?

ABISH: It will do you much good.

MORIAMI: Where's the spoon, child? What have you done with the spoon?

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ABISH: Here it is.

MORIAMI: I cannot lift it! The pain that assails my hand!

[Abish feeds him, which he obviously enjoys.]

I like it not!

ABISH: If you remember, it was yourself requested it.

MORIAMI: I requested this? This -- this locust pudding?

ABISH: You did.

MORIAMI: I cannot remember it... My mind is not as sharp as it once was. The minds of the old --

ABISH: "-- are not as sharp as the minds of the young!" You're always saying it, though I am not fooled. You're more cunning than you let on to be!

MORIAMI: There! You see! I cannot even keep it in my mouth!

ABISH: Then there is no need to keep it here.

MORIAMI: Wait! Not so hasty, little mother! Perhaps I shall be hungry after awhile.

[She replaces the dish. He eats.]

It is not all that bad.

ABISH: The pain in your hand is gone?

MORIAMI: It comes and goes...

(grins) ...with my appetite.

ABISH: And your meanness.

MORIAMI: I allow myself this one fault that you may think I still need catering to.

[Abish starts to go.]

You are going?

ABISH: There is work yet to be done.

MORIAMI: Forget the work! Stay and speak with your old father! Do you not work all the day supporting the vanity of our gracious Queen? Stay and support a little of mine.

ABISH: You shouldn't speak thus about Queen Sephariah.

MORIAMI: Afraid they will hear me, are you?

ABISH: It is always wise to be careful of your tongue.

MORIAMI: What could they do to me? I totter on the brink of death; whether they push me in or I fall, it matters not!

[A coughing spasm begins.]

ABISH: See what happens when you excite yourself? We have much to be thankful to the King and Queen: this room in the palace, where you can be near the court physician, food, garments, all provided for us. You must cease this talk about dying.

MORIAMI: Talking is all I have left.

ABISH: There, you've finished your meal.

MORIAMI: That was one of your mother's tricks -- get me talking so I would fail to notice her cooking.

ABISH: You try so hard to be the lion. But you are a lamb with a lion's roar!

MORIAMI: You become more like your mother each day. Like you, she could see within me; she understood. What is this latest scandal I hear of in the court? Have the King and Queen quarreled again?

ABISH: Again and still! We hear it all throughout the palace!

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MORIAMI: Curse this chair that keeps me still! I miss everything! Tell me about it!

ABISH: (*Evading the subject*) King Lamoni shouted and the Queen threw things.

MORIAMI: What did they argue about?

ABISH: Seemingly nothing! A jewel for her new gown, I know not. The sound of battle came louder than the words.

MORIAMI: Succulent! Delightful! Oh, the arguments your mother and I would enjoy! What else?

ABISH: The King thought he was correct; the Queen knew she was!

MORIAMI: (*Excited*) On what?

ABISH: (*Changing the subject*) It is time you rested. I have spoiled you enough.

MORIAMI: Ungrateful daughter! Playing on the sympathies of a blind old man! Whetting his curiosity -- !

ABISH: Look! You tremble!

MORIAMI: You should not have told me that! When I am excited, I get upset, then I get more excited -- unless you tell me all!

ABISH: (*After a pause*) A Nephite was taken captive and is now a servant to the King!

MORIAMI: From --?

ABISH: Zarahemla.

MORIAMI: (*Savors it*) Zarahemla--

ABISH: But this one came alone.

MORIAMI: If there be but one chance only that he is the one. Inside I feel myself a hypocrite, to hide what we know from our people; pretending reverence for a lifeless deity! To be at last what I know I am, yea, and to talk of it openly, freely! Go to him, tell him of us -- the vision, and of the others who came; of our conversion!

ABISH: And if he be not the man, we will be discovered!

MORIAMI: Disguise yourself. If he is the man, bring him unto me!

ABISH: Being a servant to the King, how could he ever come to us without suspicion?

MORIAMI: If he is also the servant of the Lord, he will find a way! To think that it might be he, at last!

ABISH: I'll do what I can! Do not excite yourself!

MORIAMI: Do not excite myself? The most promising news since that day, long ago, and I should not excite myself! Excite! Excite! Oh, my decrepit bones!

[They FREEZE.]

LAMONI: You had joined the Nephite even before he came to our land? Were you all against me in that day? Was there no one loyal to the King?

[Antihannah comes down from the platform.]

ANTIHAMNAH: (*Sarcastically*) Yes, there was one who was loyal. One who was always loyal.

LAMONI: Ammon, yes. Loyalty as I had never known.

ANTIHAMNAH: Loyalty you never deserved. Do you remember our first words of Ammon?

LAMONI: Do I remember? Could I but forget!

[Sephariah and Zephonia come down from the platform and cross to a table. Antihannah EXITS. Lamoni also moves to the table. ABISH ENTERS with a large roast.]

(Very loud and very drunkenly) Here! Place it here! Before the King!

SEPHARIAH: Eat not so much that you will regret it after.

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LAMONI: So you hear, Zephonia? Your mother fears I will not share it with her!

ZEPHONIA: Nay, Father. She watches for your health.

LAMONI: Worry not yourself, Sephariah. Should I take ill, Jakor will mumble a few phrases and ring that ridiculous bell and I will once again return to the supper table!

(Takes a bite) Good! Good!

(To Abish) Tell the cook the King said it was underdone!

SEPHARIAH: Lamoni!

LAMONI: If a cook be too content, the meal will suffer! Let him think He is not doing well, and he will try all the harder to please me! Elam! More wine! There is not enough on the table to give a bath to a gnat!

ZEPHONIA: When does grandfather expect us?

SEPHARIAH: The last part of next week.

LAMONI: It will take that long to prepare and send ahead the wardrobe you two and Abish are bringing along.

SEPHARIAH: Has the first caravan returned yet?

LAMONI: Yesterday.

[Elam ENTERS with wine.]

Ah! The wine!

[Lamoni holds up his goblet, which Elam fills.]

One would think we were staying a month! Put the bottle here and go.

[Elam EXITS. Lamoni drinks.]

Now, that is wine!

ZEPHONIA: Let's leave tomorrow!

LAMONI: Balkan will still be there a week from now! I'm sure his love for you will carry him through that long -- Sephariah, take some wine!

ZEPHONIA: If there were men worthy of me here, I would not have to make love with my cousin!

LAMONI: Say the word, and I'll find you a new lover!

ZEPHONIA: But he will do for now. He has a charming wit -- likable enough.

LAMONI: Like his uncle Lamoni! Sephariah, you're not drinking.

SEPHARIAH: This food does not set well with me.

LAMONI: Look, your own daughter surpasses you!

[Elam ENTERS, goes to Lamoni, whispers in his ear.]

Well, bring him in!

ELAM: Master, he appears in a very serious mood.

LAMONI: Then by all means, usher him in! Let's pour a little wine down his throat, and he'll crack open like an over ripe melon -- and, Elam, bring another goblet!

[Elam EXITS.]

This meal has now become a reunion with the return of your most holy uncle, Sephariah. If I can persuade my brothers and father to come, we will not have to make the long trip!

[Antihannah ENTERS with Elam, who places a goblet on the table, fills it, then leaves.]

Antihannah, come join us! Have some wine!

[Antihannah sits, first kissing Sephariah on cheek, Zephonia on forehead.]

ANTIHAMNAH: Sephariah. Zephonia.

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LAMONI: How went the trip to Olgatha?

ANTIHAMNAH: Remarkably without incident.

LAMONI: You returned yesterday. Why have you waited so long before gracing us with your presence?

ANTIHAMNAH: I -- was -- looking about the kingdom, taking survey of a few things.... Your father is holding up superbly.

LAMONI: Refreshing.

ANTIHAMNAH: And the Queen -- in good form as always.

ZEPHONIA: Balkan?

ANTIHAMNAH: Just arriving as I left. He is as anxious to see you as you are to see him!

SEPHARIAH: It will be good to see them all again.

ANTIHAMNAH: What has happened in the Land of Ishmael during my absence, Lamoni? I trust we are all still disciples of Nehor?

LAMONI: Have you at last begun to take an interest in your work?

ANTIHAMNAH: Purely externally. The image, you understand.

LAMONI: *(Suddenly morose)* You talk to me of images? Well, be at ease. There has been no great falling away. The people are still devoted -- somewhat against their will -- but devoted nonetheless.

ANTIHAMNAH: We haven't gone to war, increased the empire any?

LAMONI: How much can happen in five days?

ANTIHAMNAH: Indeed! How much?

[Lamoni looks up, his smile now gone with his appetite.]

SEPHARIAH: *(Takes her cue)* Lamoni, I will not be able to finish the meal. Zephoniah, come with your mother.

[Sephariah and Zephonia EXIT.]

ANTIHAMNAH: Lamoni, I was barely within the gates of the city when the soldiers had laid the news before me... Then, as I approached the palace, I saw the object of the city's conversation in the stable.

LAMONI: If you are going to rail at me, Antihannah, save your breath. I have made up my mind.

ANTIHAMNAH: I am curious, disposed to know your motive.

LAMONI: We have known each other too long to play such games. Are you displeased -- about the Nephite?

ANTIHAMNAH: *(Mocking)* What right have I, the High Priest of Nehor, to dictate to the Great King Lamoni?

LAMONI: *(Not angry, pleading)* That will cease, Antihannah!

ANTIHAMNAH: You've developed sharpness in my absence!

LAMONI: I needed a strong and faithful servant. The Nephite was the man.

ANTIHAMNAH: He seems reluctant to embrace the Order of Nehor. Does that sound like a faithful servant?

LAMONI: Faithful to me!

ANTIHAMNAH: How may you be certain?

LAMONI: Antihannah, since these four days, I have answered endless questions. In my kingdom, I answer to no one.

ANTIHAMNAH: You forget how you attained unto the Kingship.

LAMONI: My nights are black for remembering, I look into a mirror having no reflection, no ending.

ANTIHAMNAH: Then look into a mirror that does, the mirror of your action here with this foreign man among us, planted in our midst by your doing! Do you see the image as I do? The workings of his subtle

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mind for dissension among the Lamanites!

LAMONI: He is but another slave!

ANTIHAMNAH: I implore you to look upon this matter from my eyes; the eyes of Antihannah. This mirror into which you look sees an old and trusted friend, one Lamoni, whom you know to be without original thoughts of his own, now King! More than that, the mirror cannot show us; it is vacant to reveal that since that day Lamoni took the throne, it has been Antihannah, who in reality, directs the kingdom, Antihannah who, in very deed, helped Lamoni become King. Now you see this King, this trusted friend, one day decide to exercise his phantom authority without consent and counsel of him who made it come to pass! Antihannah is concerned, for it is so unlike his friend to do this. He comes to the King, hoping that he may subtly remind him in whose hand moves the sceptre of power. There is your so-called mirror of blackness! It reflects the villainy of mistrust and will end in havoc! How does the King give reason to such an ending?

LAMONI: No reason beyond that which I have spoken. Antihannah, you would not begrudge a tired, old monarch a little innocent amusement, would you?

ANTIHAMNAH: I believe we understand each other. I take my leave.

[Antihannah EXITS. Elam ENTERS.]

LAMONI: I was in strange good spirits, while he was gone. With his return, even this meal fails to please me. *(A pause)* Does he carry out my orders?

ELAM: Ammon, you mean? When we are still asleep, he is already out in the fields, running the horses, or haying them, and at dusk -- we are turning, tired and worn, he is yet active, brushing them, inspecting the locks on the stables!

LAMONI: And yet so untouchable.

(Quickly, after a pause) I would that Ammon come unto me.

ELAM: I will bring him.

LAMONI: You shall stay! Let Abish fetch him. Abish! Abish! Find me Ammon! Tell me, Elam, have I changed?

ELAM: Sire?

LAMONI: Since Ammon has come -- am I still the same?

ELAM: My King shall always be the same to me, wise and kind and generous.

LAMONI: Elam, I am about to do something which I will no doubt soon regret!

ELAM: Then why do it, O Master?

LAMONI: Call it the futile flailings of a prisoner King to rebel against his bondsman. Call it what you will. I know only this reason: the Nephite.

[Abish ENTERS.]

ABISH: He is here.

LAMONI: Go now, Elam.

(To Abish) Show him in.

[Abish and Elam EXIT. Ammon and Abish ENTER.]

Sit down, Ammon.

[Ammon sits, FREEZES.]

Yes, I did regret, later, for making you my personal man, then. How strange it is. All had warned me against you -- I had even warned myself -- yet to no avail. Your campaign of kindness and loyalty stole my reason

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and that day I began to -- I hesitate to utter the word -- almost worship you. But if it was worship that mine eyes held for you that day, there were other eyes that wrote a different line.

[Crosses to Abish.]

I remember wondering what that look meant when she had ushered you in to me. Then, thinking it perhaps only the admiration of woman for man, I knew not what secrets lay within your bosom, that you were wondering when you could corner this Nephite, to see if "he were the one."

[LIGHTS up on platform. Ammon returns to his place there. Sephariah turns, looks at Lamoni.]

SEPHARIAH: Abish was not alone in her devious designs.

LAMONI: You? And why not? What reason gave I you for aught but hate against me?

SEPHARIAH: Nay, Lamoni. Love drove me to my deed.

LAMONI: Love? You loved me, still?

SEPHARIAH: So much that I had been brought to bed in my worry over what was happening to you, my king.

[Jakor turns away from the platform and comes down to join Sephariah, who has already come down to Lamoni.]

I had sent for Jakor, more for the need to unburden my heart than to have him heal me.

(To Jakor, as Lamoni moves off)

Much better, Jakor.

JAKOR: You have only to rest a bit.

SEPHARIAH: I fear our visits will be more frequent until the Nephite is gone.

JAKOR: Let it not hang so heavy on your thoughts.

SEPHARIAH: My concern is with the King. Is he not erratic, Jakor?

JAKOR: Yes, my lady.

SEPHARIAH: Is it not my duty to be concerned?

JAKOR: Indeed it is. But, again I say, let not your mind dwell too much thereupon.

SEPHARIAH: I know; I brood, for I am cursed with a backward tongue. When I want to express him love, only hate is said.

JAKOR: I would that you sleep, O Queen, for only in sleep will you find deliverance from the fainting spells which so suddenly come upon you.

ZEPHONIA: Words of confusion as to the meaning of all this, words of anger.

SEPHARIAH: What right have they to question their King?

ZEPHONIA: But, Mother, these words anticipated brought you to your bed.

SEPHARIAH: My pretense about not wanting the Nephite -- that's what you fail to comprehend? A program of pretended anger performed to humor the King. In truth, I like the Nephite... What think you of him?

ZEPHONIA: In what way, Mother?

SEPHARIAH: As a woman, thinking on a man.

ZEPHONIA: I cannot think on him thus, his being a Nephite.

SEPHARIAH: Come, my dear, I know you better. Is he not appealing?

ZEPHONIA: There is a certain beauty in his form.

SEPHARIAH: I will not be angry with you for being attracted to him; I understand the ways of young love.

ZEPHONIA: You speak of love? I know not love towards that man.

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SEPHARIAH: In time. In time. He is nice to you?

ZEPHONIA: I have seen him once. He smiled and bid me well.

SEPHARIAH: There's a good sign!

ZEPHONIA: Smiling in his voice and brightness in his face!

SEPHARIAH: You are attracted to him.

(Zephonia withdraws, realizing her mother's trickery)

Forgive me? Is there not an air of pure grace about him?

ZEPHONIA: I have seen him in the garden, walking and gazing at the flowers, seeming to communicate with them without speaking. He reaches out, touches them not with the strength of a man, but with tenderness, as if they were aware of his hands. And I have beheld him in the fields with the horses, his body wet with his own work, training the fiercest steeds.

SEPHARIAH: He is strong and certain in all he does.

ZEPHONIA: And I have spied him at work in the new building, his tunic put aside, that strength rippling and stretching across his back --

[Their eyes meet. After a beat.]

SEPHARIAH: You want him?

ZEPHONIA: It is not possible.

SEPHARIAH: If I were to find a way whereby he will give in to you --?

ZEPHONIA: How could you?

SEPHARIAH: Marriage, my daughter! Marriage to the Nephite! Whereas now, words of disaffection fill the streets, as a Prince, he would demand loyalty.

ZEPHONIA: You are sick and ailing because he shares this palace, and yet you speak of marriage?

SEPHARIAH: What I was so against at first, will work to the advantage of all concerned; Lamoni will have his servant; my daughter a man to wed.

ZEPHONIA: And you, Mother?

SEPHARIAH: Mothers -- though they are Queens, seeing their daughters happy -- live again their own romantic joys.

ZEPHONIA: Before he would marry with me, a Lamanite, he would have to be less Nephite than now he is.

SEPHARIAH: If neither you nor I can sway him to it, I shall maneuver that your father think of it.

ZEPHONIA: You knew, how I looked upon him? And, Mother, whenever you tire of Lamoni's disregard, you shall share Ammon.

SEPHARIAH: You shall have him. He shall have you! Now, go my daughter, let me rest.

[Zephonia EXITS.]

(To herself, with self-loathing) "You shall share him!" Share him, indeed -- this wilting sack of royal bones, share her daughter's bed? O what have I come unto, when daughters speak old blasphemies as if they were new caresses?

[She lies with head back, eyes closed as LIGHTS out. Lamoni ENTERS. Sephariah enters the light. She speaks to Lamoni.]

Why? I know not. I had a vague feeling that, in offering Zephonia to Ammon, and he refuse her, your anger at seeing your "wonderful Nephite" disobey you would cause you to banish him, that you would once again be mine totally.

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LAMONI: Was I ever totally yours?

SEPHARIAH: No. But you were even less so with Ammon in the court.

LAMONI: Then I was right.

SEPHARIAH: When?

LAMONI: That day you came to me, suggesting I give Zephonia to Ammon.

SEPHARIAH: You knew my reasoning?

LAMONI: I suspected.

[Antihannah comes down once again, stands before Lamoni. Sephariah EXITS.]

(To Antihannah) Yes. You were there, as well. You were always there.

[LIGHTS up.]

Your face causes memories I would not dwell upon.

ANTIHAMNAH: Lamoni, not this. There must needs be good relations if I am to do my job, and you yours.

LAMONI: Mine? A figurehead for an unworthy sovereign.

ANTIHAMNAH: If you like not our little arrangement, you have but to make it known, and the royal powers will be completely yours.

LAMONI: You know that I would not -- cannot -- dare not.

ANTIHAMNAH: *(After a pause)* The Nephite. He has increased attention from your court. I have noticed how your own daughter watches him when she thinks he does not see and your young servant Elam follows him about wherever he goes, with a fascination, an awe, that should be reserved for you alone.

LAMONI: And why should he not be admired? Ammon is impressive in many ways.

ANTIHAMNAH: If you speak of his efficiency at carrying out your orders, I join in fascination. But on your part, is there nothing more?

LAMONI: The burden of your position causes you to cloak your meaning behind words of idle talk, but to me, you will state your thoughts directly!

ANTIHAMNAH: Could it be you are also overly impressed by this Nephite? You have been absent from morning supplication for two days now.

LAMONI: I -- I have been ill. You are not unaware of that.

ANTIHAMNAH: Is it not that you have found other ideas more suitable to your liking?

LAMONI: Your meaning escapes me.

ANTIHAMNAH: I overlooked the implications of your permitting the Nephite to follow his god.

LAMONI: What does it matter?

ANTIHAMNAH: These Nephites! They cannot be content to let the rest of us stay in our "ignorant state" as they suppose it to be, but at every chance attempt to force us to eat of their wares. My following is shaky enough; I would not that it be further endangered by the smooth sophistries of the Nephite.

LAMONI: He will not change.

ANTIHAMNAH: A lifetime of spurious truths is hard to pull from any man's heart -- even more difficult if one does not want to!

LAMONI: His influence beyond making my life more pleasant is of no great concern.

ANTIHAMNAH: *(Sarcastic)* As you wish.

[Antihannah FREEZES.]

LAMONI: Antihannah. You are your own undoing. In your efforts to conserve your standing in the court, you

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in very deed, sowed the seeds of its eventual dissolution. For, whereas before, the Nephite's prowess was to me but a wonderment and a mystery, your words did cause me to think upon it differently, and I remember thinking from then on, perhaps it is this Nephite's god who gives him such fidelity to an enemy king. Why cannot my god inspire such feelings among my own people?

[Sephariah ENTERS just as Antihannah re-animates.]

ANTIHAMNAH: Ah, Sephariah, my niece? I had thought you ill, as well.

SEPHARIAH: It is time I be up.

ANTIHAMNAH: Is that not the manner with illness? When one in a family is afflicted, it soon makes its rounds to the rest.

SEPHARIAH: Yes, Uncle... I would be alone with Lamoni.

[Antihannah EXITS.]

LAMONI: And then you laid before me your plan.

SEPHARIAH: Think of it! Ammon: Prince of Ishmael! Away with his sackcloth garment and cover him with robes more befitting his regal bearing! Silks, satins, kingly cloth to adorn his frame! Ammon, the Prince Ammon, your son!

LAMONI: Son? Ammon, my son? How I would have a son such as he, a glory to his father's throne! But I am loathe to inflict him with my daughter's affections.

SEPHARIAH: You know not your own daughter. She already thinks a women's thoughts, and would be a fitting wife to the Nephite!

LAMONI: But is Ammon of similar feeling toward her?

SEPHARIAH: Will he not do all that you command? If he hesitates, a forceful prod at his loyalty will move him to it.

LAMONI: Ammon, son to King Lamoni! I like it well. There's a sound to it!

SEPHARIAH: The sound of a worthy prince for a great father!

LAMONI: Grandfather! Can you imagine it, Sephariah? Grandchildren? To pass my posterity through the loins of such a one as he I would be proud, Sephariah! Proud to increase my seed! And I, being their grandfather, would take them upon my knee while I sat upon the throne; they shall honor me, and will desire to grow up and be like me!

SEPHARIAH: Am I to have no granddaughters to spoil?

LAMONI: I will see to it that Zephonia bears in variety.

SEPHARIAH: Shall I send for Zephonia that you may tell' her of your decision?

LAMONI: There it is! That's the point at which I began to suspect your queenly proposals smacked of hidden desires. Your anxiety that I reach a decision, coupled with a seeming desire that your daughter unite with Ammon, whom you hated. Nevertheless, I decided to agree with you, to see what would become of it.

[Crosses up to Ammon, frozen, on the platform.]

At first you refused.

AMMON: I prefer to choose my own women.

LAMONI: Of course, she kicks like a shrew at times, but that will cause you little worry. Just flail her from morn until night and she'll behave!

AMMON: You would that I marry a woman not of my choosing?

LAMONI: As I seem to recall, you never did agree but, out of loyalty to me, you didn't blatantly refuse, either.

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Sephariah and I left you to each other, she hoping you would spurn her daughter's advances, myself knowing you would.

[ZEPHONIA moves down from platform, followed by Ammon.]

What? Is there more to this vision? For what reason is this intimacy laid before my eyes?

[Zephonia lays down the picnic basket. Ammon doesn't even notice, his thoughts elsewhere.]

ZEPHONIA: Something is wrong, Ammon?

AMMON: The sky is too pale. Those trees on the horizon are jagged and forlorn. Too much brightness in the air today.

ZEPHONIA: Brighter than Zephonia, it seems. Do you not find me captivating?

AMMON: In what sense mean you the word?

ZEPHONIA: In its only sense: attractive, alluring, sensual.

AMMON: I've known you such a short while.

ZEPHONIA: These things take not much time to be discovered. They are known of the moment, at first glance. I am much wanted throughout the kingdom, and you will have me in two days. Men have fought over me, did you know that? Two of my father's lords once desired me to wife and a most interesting battle was arranged. They were stripped, given their swords and a horse to ride bareback into the mountains. Whichever one of them was to come back alive would have me. Neither one of them returned. But I am glad, because I cared for neither one!

AMMON: These fruits are delicious. From your father's garden?

ZEPHONIA: From my garden. Shall I tell you of the marriage celebration that lasts four days? There is much drinking, much song, and everyone becomes delightfully unconscious of his own actions! I think that, were you to go into the mountains, you would return the victor.

[She leans in to kiss him; he offers her a piece of fruit.]

AMMON: Taste that. Is it not delicious?

ZEPHONIA: Are you made of stone? I do not please you?

AMMON: Not true, Zephonia. I -- like you.

ZEPHONIA: Because I am Lamoni's daughter?

AMMON: I like you for what you are.

ZEPHONIA: *(Moving in closer)* And what is that?

AMMON: A woman -- beautiful, warm, essential in the right parts. desirable.

ZEPHONIA: Almost those are words of love. Then why not love, since you are a man, also beautiful, warm, essential in the right parts. Do you not think I am also engaging in conversation?

AMMON: Verily... you have a... way... with words... and you have an excellent garden!

ZEPHONIA: Yes, I have many things. My father being King, I have but to ask for whatsoever I desire and it is mine. I have many fine gowns, servants of my own. I have all but one thing, my world is full, except for you! Tell me! Can there be hope of that? Tell me!

[She leans in toward him, he pulls away.]

Your answer!

AMMON: I regret what I cannot, will not say.

ZEPHONIA: Or do, Ammon, or do! You do not want to kiss me!

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AMMON: I did not say that! Wanting is not doing.

ZEPHONIA: Riddles! You speak in riddles! You showed in your actions that I am repulsive to you! Each time I lean in, you move away!

AMMON: I am sorry you feel thus. Truly.

ZEPHONIA: Then I shall not worry you more. Wait! Do you hear?

AMMON: Yes. The birds.

ZEPHONIA: There are many of them on in part of the forest. They are bright turquoise, lavender, some of cream feathers with red on the top.

AMMON: You know much about birds and the forest.

ZEPHONIA: It fascinates me. Sometimes the walls of the palace seem to close in on me, but out here, I am free, with naught but the sky to hold me down!

AMMON: I, too!

ZEPHONIA: We have something in common, you and I.

AMMON: I have spent nights innumerable under the stars, looking up and imagining I could see forever, but never do.

ZEPHONIA: What a glorious feeling that should be! When I think on such puzzling things, I feel all the more alone.

AMMON: One need not be alone.

ZEPHONIA: (*Shivers*) A chill from the North, through the low spot in those mountains.

[She places his arm around her and speaks softly.]

What do you think when you look at the clouds?

AMMON: I gaze at the buds and I imagine that I am moving and the clouds are standing still.

ZEPHONIA: Amazing, these Nephite ways!

[Pause. Their eyes catch.]

Convince me now that when you gaze upon me, you do not desire to kiss me passionately!

AMMON: You were not to speak of that again.

ZEPHONIA: I know, but I must! You treat me as a homely peasant girl!

AMMON: Believe me, it is not that!

[She moves closer in.]

ZEPHONIA: Our souls sing a song akin to that which the bird sang. There is no fighting it!

AMMON: Zephonia, I would --

ZEPHONIA: -- Kiss me if I let you. I let you. Here.

[She places her head in his hands.]

My head in your hands. Yours in mine.

[Closer still,]

No one will see. No one.

[Ammon moves towards her, when there is a commotion off-stage. Abish ENTERS disguised as an old peasant woman.]

25 PAGES IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE SCRIPT