**The Curious End of the Famine in Samaria**

(II Kings 6: 24-7:20, King James Version)

STORYTELLER 1

And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria.

STORYTELLER 3

And there was a great famine in Samaria.

STORYTELLER 1

And, behold.

STORYTELLER 2

They besieged it.

STORYTELLER

Until a donkey’s head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver.

STORYTELLER 4

And the fourth part of a cab of dove’s dung for five pieces of silver.

STORYTELLER 1

And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying.

FIRST SAMARITAN WOMAN

Help, my lord, O king.

STORYTELLER 1

And he said.

KING OF ISRAEL

If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? Out of the barnfloor? Or out of the winepress?

STORYTELLER 1

And the king said unto her.

KING OF ISRAEL

What aileth thee?

STORYTELLER 1

And she answered.

FIRST SAMARITAN WOMAN

This woman said unto me, “Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son tomorrow.” So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, “Give thy son, that we may eat him.” And she hath hid her son.

STORYTELLER 1

And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes.

(KING OF ISRAEL tears his shirt off in anger and signals to MESSENGER to seize the women. MESSENGER manages to hold FIRST SAMARITAN WOMAN but the other woman escapes.)

STORYTELLER 3

And he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked.

STORYTELLER 2

And, behold.

STORYTELLER 5

He had sackcloth within upon his flesh.

(KING OF ISRAEL is wearing bloody bandages around his chest. He gestures for FIRST SAMARITAN WOMAN to be taken to prison. She is taken off kicking and screaming.)

STORYTELLER 1

Then he said.

KING OF ISRAEL

God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.

(ELISHA sits in his house with two or three ELDERS.)

STORYTELLER 1

But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him; and the king sent a man from before him.

STORYTELLER 6

But ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders.

ELISHA

See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? Look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his master’s feet behind him?

STORYTELLER 1

And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him.

(The ELDERS move to wait behind the door. ELISHA turns his back to the door. The MESSENGER enters to kill ELISHA, but this MESSENGER is attacked from behind by the ELDERS. ELISHA pays no attention, but simply turns to kneel and await the KING OF ISRAEL’S arrival. The KING OF ISRAEL and his LORD do indeed arrive. ELISHA gestures to the ELDERS to join him kneeling, which they do. The MESSENGER seizes ELISHA, and takes out an ominous knife, ready to slit ELISHA’S throat on command.)

STORYTELLER 1

And he said.

KING OF ISRAEL

Behold, this evil is of the LORD. What? Should I wait for the LORD any longer?

(ELISHA raises a hand.)

STORYTELLER 1

Then Elisha said.

ELISHA

Hear ye the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord, “Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.”

(KING OF ISRAEL holds up one finger, indicating that ELISHA has until tomorrow. KING OF ISRAEL turns to exit, holding out his hand to A LORD for support. This LORD laughs at ELISHA.)

STORYTELLER 1

Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said.

A LORD

Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?

STORYTELLER 1

And he said.

ELISHA

Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

(KING OF ISRAEL and his men exit. Four LEPERS sit in a pile of rags, all connected.)

STORYTELLER 1

And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate. And they said one to another.

FIRST LEPER

(with other LEPERS finishing thoughts for him)

Why sit we here until we die? If we say we will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.

(The LEPERS move out into the fields, clinging together, moving as one.)

STORYTELLER 1

And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there.

(The CHORUS creates the noise of chariots and horses supporting this flashback scene of the departure of the Syrians.)

STORYTELLER 1

For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host.

(STORYTELLER 1 raises his hand and the noise stops and the Syrian soldiers race across.)

STORYTELLER 1 (continued)

And they said one to another.

SYRIAN SOLDIER

Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.

(The Syrian soldiers continue across the stage, exiting in a panic. The LEPERS

mime finding things and hiding them.)

STORYTELLER 1

Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their donkeys, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life. And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it. Then they said one to another.

SECOND LEPER

We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us.

FIRST LEPER

Now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king’s household.

STORYTELLER 1

So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying.

FIRST LEPER

(calling to the PORTER, with the other LEPERS echoing his words with improvised outbursts.)

We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and donkey’s tied, and the tents as they were.

(KING’S servant hears this from the PORTER and runs inside.)

STORYTELLER 1

And he called the porters; and they told it to the king’s house within. And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants.

KING OF ISRAEL

(entering)

I will now show you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.

STORYTELLER 1

And one of his servants answered and said.

KING’S SERVANT

Let some take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city, behold, they are as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, I say, they are even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed: and let us send and see.

STORYTELLER 1

They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying.

KING OF ISRAEL

Go and see.

STORYTELLER 1

And they went after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. And the messengers returned, and

told the king.

(The king’s people all race out past the lepers to see this wonderful thing. A

LORD goes on ahead while all others wait at the GATE.)

STORYTELLER 2

And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians.

FOURTH LEPER

So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord.

THIRD LEPER

And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate.

(A LORD examines the field of battle and then opens the GATE for all to rush out. They do rush out, crushing A LORD. Freeze.)

STORYTELLER 1

And the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said.

STORYTELLER 3 and STORYTELLER 6

Who spake when the king came down to him.

STORYTELLER 1

And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying.

(A LORD climbs out of the freeze, and ELISHA enters. They repeat their earlier lines, but facing front.)

ELISHA

Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be tomorrow about this time in the gate of Samaria.

STORYTELLER 1

And that lord answered the man of God, and said.

A LORD

Now, behold, if the Lord should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be?

STORYTELLER 1

And he said.

ELISHA

Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

(A LORD climbs back into the crushing image, and ELISHA exits.)

STORYTELLER 1

And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and

(with a wry smile)

he died.