

Chapter 2

The Shulammite's Dilemma Begins

Song of Solomon 1:1-17

SOLOMON'S SIREN SONG: SOLOMON RUINS EVERYTHING

The soldiers come to the vineyard in the afternoon bringing the Shulammite's mother. When the Maiden looks up, her mother is holding out her arms to her. The Maiden runs to her and falls into her mother's embrace.

Her mother stands back with her hands on her daughter's shoulders. Looking into her eyes, she says, "The King wants to marry you. I told his men you're 13 now...you're of age...you can decide for yourself." Her mother brushes a wisp of hair out of the Maiden's eyes, then softly touches her cheek.

"But Mother, what about my beloved Shepherd? You know we planned to get married this spring."

"Hush, dear, hush... You're only promised to him. You can change your mind." Her mother's hands drop from her shoulders. She takes her daughter's hands and brings them to her lips and kisses them. "Missy, my dear, if you decide to marry the King, we'll all go to Jerusalem and live with you. It will be wonderful for all of us. It will make life so much easier since your father died."

"But, Mother..."

Her mother stares into her eyes and moves their clasped hands to the Maiden's lips for several seconds. Then she wraps her arms around her daughter for a parting hug and whispers in her ear, "Don't forget what I always told you about the gazelles and the hinds of the field. Take time to think about everything the King says to you. You'll know what to do."

With a parting kiss to her cheek, she moves back and speaks loud enough for the soldiers to hear, "I love you, Missy. Now go and make your family proud."

The Shulammite's dilemma begins.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

FIRST DAY - AFTERNOON

The curtains open to reveal a backdrop of vineyards dotting the countryside of the town of Shunem, the Shulammite's hometown. Solomon camps here while he inspects his vineyard that he leases to the Shulammite's family (Song 6:10-11; 8:11-12). Always on the lookout for a pretty face and luscious breasts, the King notices the young Shulammite vineyard keeper and has her brought to his chambers. In the foreground are the tents of the King's camp. These multi-purpose Oriental tents contain many rooms. One chamber or inner room opens with the Shulammite and the King's virgins-in-waiting inside. The Virgins hover around the Maiden, preparing her to dine with the King (Song 1:12).

Longing for the Shepherd

Song of Solomon 1:1-4a:

*"The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.
'May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For your love is better than wine.
Your oils have a pleasing fragrance,
Your name is like purified oil;
Therefore the maidens love you.
Draw me after you and let us run together!
The king has brought me into his chambers.'"*

When I took New York Times bestselling romance author Phyliss Miranda's creative writing class, she taught us how to captivate our readers in the first scene, "You must begin with a jolt into action." She explained, "Your opening can use a complication or conflict, a particular work place or historical setting. You can describe a kiss or a fight or the realization of being in love or a love scene."

The Song of Solomon, a true historical romance, was recorded over 3000 years before the first bestselling Texas romance used a kiss to hook readers. As I attend writing classes, I am constantly amazed at how modern the Shulammitte's story is even into the 21st century. This was especially true in Phyliss' class.

The first four verses begin with all four techniques Phyliss taught us: (1) the kiss, (2) the realization of being in love with the Shepherd, (3) conflict of wanting to run away with the Shepherd, and (4) the historical setting of being brought to Solomon's tent for his inspection.

Thus, the first scene of this exciting true romance called the Song of Solomon captures our attention as the young Shulammitte maiden's thoughts race as she realizes her dilemma. She surveys Solomon's magnificent tent. Even the richest man in the village doesn't begin to have a luxurious tent like this.

In the midst of amazing splendor, the Maiden's words reflect extreme emotional loneliness bordering on panic. Several wide-eyed Virgins from Jerusalem that she's never met before flit about her. Some pull at her clothes with obvious disgust. Others fill a golden tub with warm water and milk to soften and silken her skin. They add essential oils and dried flower petals to put her in the mood for love (Song 1:12).

While enticed by curiosity about Solomon and the chance for financial rewards for her family, the Maiden's predicament alarms her. Overwhelmed, she yearns, then pleads for the Shepherd to come rescue her. All of her senses are on high alert adding to her increasing anxiety.

The expensive furnishings, unusual fragrances, and private chatter and snickers make her head swirl. The disapproving touches and offers of rich pastries nauseate her. Perhaps the bath will soothe her nerves.

Professor of Old Testament at Denver Seminary, Richard S. Hess, in his excellent study of the Hebrew words in his book *Song of Songs*, points out how these first four verses are unique in the Song of Solomon:

The sense created is the (paratactic [a literary technique, in writing or speaking, that favors short, simple sentences, with the use of coordinating rather than subordinating conjunctions]) piling on of one descriptive phrase after another. Indeed, the one theme that does run through vv. 2-4 is the appeal to every one of the senses in describing the love envisioned by the female and shared by the couple. There are examples of wordplay, moving from sound-centered assonance in the opening verses to repetitions, paronomasia [literary word for puns], and connections of content in vv. 5-7. The opening speech of the female lover flashes from one sensuous image to another, thereby expressing a height of emotion and delight that ignores rules of parallelism or other poetic structure. Instead, the perception of the reader is a breathtaking adventure of love that will be difficult to keep up with. (Richard S. Hess, *Song of Songs, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2005], 47-48. Used by permission.)

Notice how the Shulammitte's five senses add intense memories to her desperate longing for the Shepherd to come to her aid.

Touch—"Oh, the Kisses of His Mouth!"

Song of Solomon 1:2a:

"May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!"

Phyliss advised us, "Draw out the first kiss as long as possible to create sexual tension...but then something happens to get in the way."

The Song of Solomon does not disappoint us. The play begins with a powerful dramatic opening—an extraordinary kiss. Many commentators don't know what to make of "May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." It sounds like double talk to them—"Don't all kisses come from your mouth? Maybe the kiss contrasts with nose rubbing like some Orientals did."

Although the word kiss is used many times in the Old Testament with a few romantic implications, this is a special kind of kiss. The Shulammitte just says it differently from what modern romance authors write: "He wants to taste her."

We see the taste part of the kissing when Solomon makes his most outrageous sensuous proposal to the Maiden:

*Song of Solomon 7:7-9a:
"Your stature is like a palm tree,
And your breasts are like its clusters.
I said, 'I will climb the palm tree,
I will take hold of its fruit stalks.'
Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
And the fragrance of your breath like apples,
And your mouth like the best wine!"*

We'll save all the sexual implications of Solomon's speech until we come to it in the story. For now, notice Solomon says he craves open-mouth kissing with the Maiden. The experience will yield the exhilarating taste sensations of sweet apple cider coupled with the best wine to be swirled and sipped slowly in prolonged deep kissing.

In her crowded isolation and insecurity of not knowing what is about to happen in Solomon's tent, the Maiden wishes for the comfort of her beloved Shepherd's kisses. His kisses have moved beyond friendship and beginning courtship to a sample of the marital passion to come. He is her best friend, her soulmate, and she longs for his soothing lips to still her nervousness and fears.

Jack Schafer, Ph.D., in his online *Psychology Today* column wrote an article titled "Odd Facts About Kissing." He sheds light on the Shulammitte's craving for the Shepherd's kisses of love:

- Mucus membranes inside the mouth are permeable to hormones such as testosterone. Through open-mouth kissing, men introduce testosterone into a woman's mouth. Testosterone is absorbed through the mucus membranes in the woman's mouth and increases arousal and the likelihood that she will engage in reproductive behavior.
- Men prefer open-mouth kissing with tongue contact when kissing short-term partners to increase the probability of mating.

Mouth to mouth kissing releases hormones, which stir up sexual feelings and desires. Obviously, it's not a safe practice for a beginning relationship because it can fool a woman into thinking she loves a man when she's just reacting to the dose of testosterone he injects into her system. The moist mucus membranes may make it even more effective than if he used a hypodermic needle to inject his drug of choice.

Upon learning this, one woman said, "When I started dating my husband, I didn't even like him. I just went out with him to have someone to hang out with. We dated for three months before I let him kiss me. That night I laid awake for a long time thinking over and over, *I love him. I know I love him.* I never, ever thought I might love him until I let him kiss me."

She paused, then continued, "We dated for three years and it never occurred to me I might not really love him or he might not really love me.... Our marriage was a disaster. I learned the hard way I should never have dated a boy I wasn't attracted to, and I certainly should never have let him

kiss me. Everything changed after our first night of kissing, and not for the best. From then on, I was blind to his faults and character.”

Dr. Schafer shares how both women and men can manipulate kissing when initiating sex for just the physical release instead of for soulmating or bonding through lovemaking:

- Prostitutes avoid kissing clients on their mouths to reduce the likelihood of bonding.

“Sorry, buster; it’s all about the money. I don’t want to get romantically attached – so no kisses to stir up my hormones. Do your thing and go, but leave a big tip on the nightstand.”

- Men are more likely to initiate kissing before sex. Women are more likely to initiate kissing after sex. (John R. Schafer, “Odd Facts About Kissing, A Kiss Is Not Just a Kiss,” *Psychology Today* [Sussex Publishers, LLC, 28 Dec. 2012], Web.)

Men may innately know kissing turns a woman on or perhaps they’ve observed the power of their kisses over women. With the release of their testosterone into the mouth of the woman, kissing can quickly make her ready for action. However, naive women enjoy the flood of hormones from both kissing and intercourse. They want to bolster the experience with more kissing to bond more closely with the man.

Kissing can lead to forming unhealthy emotional relationships, especially for women. Perhaps dating couples need to reconsider self-made kissing rules such as, “I never kiss on the first date, but it’s okay on the third date.” The safest course is to fall in love before you kiss and not think you’re in love because you kissed too soon.

Taste—“Your Love Is Better than Wine”

*Song of Solomon 1:2b:
“For your love is better than wine.”*

The reason the Shulammitte aches for the Shepherd’s deep kisses is because his love is better than wine. All the way through the Song of Solomon, the speakers compare the various aspects of love, kisses, and sex to wine.

As a vineyard keeper, the Maiden knows all about making the different varieties of wines. She harvests the very sweet wine which is released from the weight of the ripe grapes pressing together before the treading begins. She works with her mother boiling the grape juice down into a sugary syrup to be mixed with water later. She also helps her brothers bury the large jugs of fermented wine in the ground to preserve them. And we’ll see later that she knows all about the differences in decanting (pouring and mixing) older and newer wines for enhancing their most robust, pleasing flavors.

These words appear to be spoken out loud before the Virgins who are getting her ready to dine with the King that evening. She lets them know she is emotionally involved with the Shepherd saying, “His love is better than wine.” Surely, they understand she has a special boyfriend.

Society uses wine to mellow out. True love does the same thing. It pacifies a person. Both wine and love are euphoric and soothing. Thus, in her dilemma of being brought before the King, the Shulammitte yearns for the comfort of the one she loves, whose love is sweeter than wine.

Smell—“Your Oils Have a Pleasing Fragrance”

*Song of Solomon 1:3a:
“Your oils have a pleasing fragrance.”*

“Oils” (*shemen*) is the general word for “oil whether pure or prepared for various uses such as perfume or ointment.... It is generally used in the literal sense, though its metaphoric use is not uncommon. The oil referred to is generally olive oil.” (*Theological Wordbook*, 937.)

“Fragrance” means “odor (as if blown):—savour, scent, smell.” (Strong, *New*, 519.)

As the Shulammitte desires the taste of the Shepherd’s kisses of love, she remembers the way he smells when he wraps his arms around her. The two memories blend together and come forth in rapid fire. Although the Israelites of this time didn’t take daily baths, they added essential oils to olive oil to protect their skin and stay fragrant.

Also, a good shepherd knew how to use oils to protect his sheep from nose flies in the summer. These flies buzz around a sheep’s head looking for a chance to lay their eggs in the moist mucous membranes of the sheep’s nose. Without treatment, in a few days, the slender worm-like larvae will hatch out and begin working their way up the nasal passages into the sheep’s head.

From then on, the sheep is tormented relentlessly. Its thrashing about, rubbing its head in the dirt, on trees, and bushes will disturb the whole herd. The mothers’ milk can dry up and their babies cease to thrive. The infected sheep sometimes kills itself trying to find relief. So at the first sign of the pesky flies, the shepherd smears oil over the sheep’s nose and head. (Philip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970], 114-116.)

Her Shepherd knows all about oils for both his sheep and himself. She closes her eyes as the memory of his fragrance soothes her nerves. His name echoes in her ears.

Hear—“Your Name Is Like Purified Oil”

Song of Solomon 1:3b:

*“Your name is like purified [poured out—NIV] oil;
Therefore the maidens love you.”*

“Purified” is more commonly translated “poured out” and means “literally, which is emptied (from one vessel to another)” New American Standard Bible footnote.

If we can’t read Hebrew, we can miss the Shulammitte’s inferences and assonance unless a knowledgeable person shares the subtle differences of her words. David Hubbard gives us a small hint in his commentary: “The wordplay of *shemen* (“oil”) and *shēm* (“name,” “person”)...sound somewhat alike.” (David Hubbard, *Mastering the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* [Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1991], 278.)

The Maiden also makes a play on ideas. She starts the stanza by saying the Shepherd’s pleasing body oils are “blown” into her nostrils for olfactory pleasure. Then she metaphorically equates the sound of his name as an essential oil that is “poured out” from him to envelop her.

Everything about the Shepherd appeals to the Maiden, from the perfumed oils he wears to his name. She finds comfort in calling out his name over and over with a “Mrs.” in front of it. She will be proud to wear his name—no “Ms.” for her!

When my mother was in high school in California, one of her teachers married a man by the name of Snodgrass. My mother and her schoolmates talked about what a horrible name Snodgrass was. They didn’t see how anyone could ever love a man with such a name.

The next summer my mother and her brother rode the bus to Oklahoma to help their grandparents harvest wheat. MawMaw, as she was called, taught my mother how to cook beans for the work crew. Her grandfather, PawPaw, employed a young harvest hand by the name of Snodgrass who always wore clean white coveralls. My mother fell in love with him, and he rode the bus with her and her brother back to California. Soon she became Mrs. Ray Snodgrass.

And through the years until her death at age 89, she was proud to be a Snodgrass. True love makes a man’s name as appealing as “purified oil” to the woman who loves him, even if his name happens to be Snodgrass. After all, Scottish “smooth” grass is beautiful to behold waving in the breeze.

And what about all those maidens loving the Shepherd? To dispel her anxiety in being brought to Solomon’s tent for his inspection, the Shulammitte wishes for the reassurance of her girlfriends.

They know and love the Shepherd, too. They understand her anguish. This scene is similar to slumber parties where girls talk and giggle about boys. The Maiden remembers her peers exclaiming over her boyfriend.

“What did you two do last weekend?”

“He’s so hot! His curly locks are to die for!”

“When you get tired of him, I’m next in line.”

See—“Let Us Run Away Together!”

Song of Solomon 1:4a:

*“Draw me after you and let us run together!
The king has brought me into his chambers.”*

With the Shulammitte’s five senses screaming at her and begging for the familiar, she cries out, “Let me see you! Right now! I’m in trouble! I’m in the King’s tent because he wants to marry me. But I love you. Come get me this instant so we can run away together. I need you now!”

Even though she has won the lottery for her herself and her family, she’s still emotionally attached to the Shepherd. They were planning a fall wedding. Now she’s offered the opportunity of a lifetime.... So why can’t she relax and enjoy the attentions of the King?

Sensory Overload—“The King Brought Me to His Chambers”

Many commentators read “chambers” and think “marriage bedroom.” They assume the Song of Solomon portrays a married couple consummating their vows. However, Solomon later explains what’s going on when he introduces the Maiden to the Queens and Concubines. He says, “I was in the country inspecting my vineyard when I saw this beautiful young vineyard keeper. And before I knew it, it was lust at first sight. I said to myself, ‘I just have to possess her body.’ I had her brought to my tent so I could inspect her more closely and propose marriage to her” (Song 6:11-12).

Obviously, Solomon was living in a tent while he toured his farmlands. But the Israelites’ tents were much different than the ones we camp in today. At the time of the Song of Solomon, most of the common people in the country still lived in tents. They lived mostly outdoors and used their tents for sleeping and shelter. The tents had at least three rooms. A central sitting room divided the men’s sleeping quarters from the women’s. As their children married, often a new room was added for the young couple. The wealthier a person became, the more rooms he added to his tent.

Even when he camps out during his inspection trips, Solomon always surrounds himself with great wealth (2 Chronicles 9:13-27). We get a small idea of how opulent his tent is from the description of his sedan chair in Song 3:9-10. Its posts were made of silver and its back was fashioned from gold. The daughters of Jerusalem fitted it with luxurious purple fabric. The Maiden has never even imagined anything so obscenely luxurious.

The extravagant sights and textures in the King’s tent along with the exotic smells Solomon traveled with overwhelm her (Song 3:6). And just outside, servants prepare a scrumptious gourmet dinner. The open sides of the tent let in the strange aromas of new flavors. Her stomach jumps in anticipation.

In her state of bewilderment, awe, and fear, she pines for the Shepherd. He is more than just her comfort zone—he’s her beloved. The Virgins interrupt her fervent speech to mock her.

The Virgins’ Mockery

Song of Solomon 1:4b:

*“We will rejoice in you [masculine singular] and be glad;
We will extol your [masculine singular] love more than wine.
Rightly do they love you [masculine singular].”*

The Shulammitte identifies the speakers in verse 5 when she addresses them as “O daughters of Jerusalem.” These are probably the same Virgins in Song 6:8. At this time Solomon’s harem consisted of 60 queens (free women he married), 80 concubines (slaves he married), and maidens or virgins without number who serve Solomon and his wives while they wait for the King to take them as one of his wives.

Some authors think the Virgins are exclaiming over the Shulammitte as the perfect bride for Solomon. However, Gary Martin, a Hebrew scholar, explains the original language shows the pronouns “you” and “your” are masculine singular—they refer to a man, not a woman. (Gary Martin, *The Song of Songs* [Kiel, West Germany, 1987], 35, 39-40.)

The Virgins do not know the Shepherd like the local maidens, so they cannot rejoice in him or extol his love more than wine. They know and love the King. But the Maiden pleads for the Shepherd to rescue her. Her dilemma? She loves the Shepherd; everybody else loves the King. This produces tremendous peer pressure for a girl to marry someone she doesn’t know or love.

With derision barely concealed in their voices, the Virgins tell her, “You think you love the Shepherd, but we rejoice in the King.” Then they lapse into sing-song mockery, “This silly girl thinks a shepherd’s love is better than wine, but we will extol your love, Solomon, more than wine. Rightly do all the maidens without number love you.” They giggle and blush at the thought of the King choosing one of them for his next bride. Everyone knows Solomon’s love is better than wine even though he shares it with so many women.

Throughout the Song of Solomon, the characters banter with each other with plays on the previous speaker’s words. The Virgins taunt the Maiden as they assert, “The wine of the King’s love is so much sweeter than the wine of your common shepherd boyfriend!”

The Shulammitte’s Persona

Black but Lovely and Swarthy

Song of Solomon 1:5-6a:
“I am black but lovely,
O daughters of Jerusalem,
Like the tents of Kedar,
Like the curtains of Solomon.
Do not stare at me because I am swarthy,
For the sun has burned me.”

“Lovely” means “be beautiful, befitting.... The primary female voice retorts that although tanned by the sun and toughened by outside work (Song 1:6), yet she is beautiful (Song 1:5).” (*Theological Wordbook*, 541.)

In other words, although the Shulammitte’s skin is black from the sun, she’s comfortable in her skin. She accepts the new beauty her blackness creates for her persona. Thus, she tells the Virgins, “I’m black, but beautiful.”

Then she makes a play on the words “black” and “swarthy.” “Black” identifies a color, not a race, i.e. her hair color in Song 5:11. The scholar Richard Hess says she coined the word “swarthy”:

Instead of using the term for “black” (*sahor*) found in the preceding verse, she coins a reduplication stem of the same root (*seharhoret*), found only here. The effect of such reduplication is to intensify the adjective [swarthy]. In this case, it makes what is black too black. (Hess, *Song*, 57.)

The Maiden’s dark tan contrasts sharply from the Virgins. Solomon married women from all over the world who brought the latest beautifying tools and ingredients with them:

Women and men alike had been doing their best to improve on nature throughout most of recorded history. As far back as Sumerian times, they had painted kohl around their eyes to enlarge them and tinted their cheeks with red dyes. Athenian women, said Aristophanes, used grease paint, antimony ore (mascara), red paint, white lead (as face powder), seaweed paint (possibly as an eye shadow), and beauty plasters (face packs). Many of these preparations were unfortunately not waterproof. "When you go out in the summer," said Eubulus nastily, "two black rivulets flow from your eyes, the sweat from your cheeks carries trickles of rouge right down to your neck, and your hair turns gray from the powder on your forehead." ...For gray hair, Mesopotamian experts recommended a mixture of opium with a dash each of the gall of a black ox, a scorpion, and a pig, brewed up with the head of a black raven and the head of a stork. The Egyptians preferred a blend of laudanum, oil, cat's womb, and raven's egg. For baldness, they said, it was best to rub into the scalp a salve made from the fat of a lion, a hippopotamus, a crocodile, a cat, a serpent, and an ibex. (Reay Tannahill, *Sex in History* [Briarcliff Manor, NY: Scarborough House, 1980], 113, 115.)

In the company of these made-up Virgins, she asserts her blackness only adds to her charm—and she has the self-confidence to know it. Even though she feels conspicuous and out of place in this lavish tent, she makes a play on her surroundings. She compares herself to the beautiful tents of Kedar and the curtains of Solomon:

The Bedouin's home is his tent, which is made of black goat's hair. He calls it *beit shaar*, i.e., "house of hair." It is made of coarse, heavy fabric, and serves to protect the family in winter from the cold winds; in the summer the sides are usually lifted, and tent serves as a sunshade. This goat's hair cloth that is used in making these tents is porous when it is dry, but becomes waterproof after the first rains have shrunk it together. (Fred H. Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* [Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1953], 14.)

The Maiden recognizes and accepts her own unique brand of beauty without placing all her hopes in her attractiveness. All through this section, she continues to play with words:

["Stare"] occurs only here and in Job (20:9; 28:7), where it describes the sharp eye of a bird of prey. It forms a poetic variant on the common verb "to see" in the first line. Therefore, it intensifies the process of seeing. If the daughters of Jerusalem stared at the female lover, the sun (the second word mentioned above) had already "stared" that much harder at her; effecting a darkening of the skin's pigments. (Hess, *Song*, 57.)

Myrrh and Her Gorgeous Brown Body

The Shulammité's language throughout the Song of Solomon indicates she and the Shepherd use myrrh, a known sunscreen for the Orientals (Song 1:13, 4:6, 14; 5:1, 5, 13). In fact, the Maiden's longings for the Shepherd frequently revolve around the herbs and essential oils of the country folks revealing a working knowledge of their benefits. Her many references to myrrh suggest she kept it in her medicine cabinet. Tiffany Rowan blogged about how she uses myrrh, probably for the same purposes as the Shulammité:

Egyptians fashioned cones of hippopotamus fat and Myrrh essential oil to wear on top of their heads. The desert heat melted the cones which caused the diluted Myrrh to run down their half-naked bodies.

Myrrh is very thick. While I don't wear a cone on my head, I do dilute Myrrh and smooth it onto my skin. I like to put 125 drops of Myrrh essential oil into 4 ounces of extra virgin olive oil.

Because this mixture is pulled into the skin, and not sitting on top of the skin like most

sunscreens, I only have to apply it once for the four-hour period my family is usually at the lake or pool. Families who spend more time in the sun may want to apply it every four-five hours.

Whether I put the Myrrh mixture on before I go into the sun to swim (or do yard work) to prevent a sunburn, or use it to soothe a sunburn after I've been in the sun, I get a gorgeous tan. That could explain why Egyptians had such gorgeous brown bodies.

The added benefit of wearing Myrrh as a sunscreen is that it doubles as an insect repellent. We don't have to worry about mosquitos while at the lake.... Myrrh is so nourishing to the skin that after long-term use, I have enjoyed soft, supple skin. (Tiffany Rowan, "Myrrh—The Egyptians Choice for Sunscreen and Insect Repellent," tiffanyrowan.blogspot.com, 03/18/2010.)

We read about the special benefits to the skin in the account of Esther. For one year, she went through a special beautification program before being presented to King Ahasuerus. It was as follows: "six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women" (Esther 2:12).

As a vineyard keeper, the Shulammitite didn't have the luxury of avoiding the hot midday sun. Her knowledge of myrrh and the loveliness of her deeply tanned body imply she uses the essential oil to protect and beautify her skin. This adds a new dimension to her coining the word swarthy to describe her exquisiteness to the staring Virgins.

Solomon's many descriptions of the Maiden's body provide a glimpse of her physical attributes. He portrays her as a tall, well-developed, slender beauty with curly hair. She has beautiful even teeth and her eyes radiate inner peace. Her perfect complexion frames her luscious mouth (Song 4:1-6; 7:6-8). The Queens describe her as perfectly built for entertaining them with sensuous belly dancing. They tell her, "The King is captivated by your long, flowing black hair" (Song 7:1-5).

The Shulammitite's comfortableness with her appearance contrasts with girls today who let rock and porn stars set the standards for outward beauty. Even some grade-school girls expose their crotches by refusing to wear panties. They degrade themselves to lure male attention their way. Yet the Shulammitite respects herself with her makeup-free tanned skin. And the world's greatest judge of horse and female flesh, King Solomon, sees and admires her genuine inner glow.

Although physical loveliness attracts a boy's attention, appearance will not ensure his devotion if beauty of character is lacking. Solomon's 1000 wives prove for all time the fallacy of exposing one's genitals to gain a boyfriend. Lust lasts for a season, then moves on to the next lovely young body.

Indeed, the Proverbs writer agrees in the description of the woman of great price:

Proverbs 31:30:

*"Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,
But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised."*

Yes, charm is deceitful as every young woman easily praises the man of her dreams. Unfortunately, as the marriage wears on, too many times her innocent admiration turns to nagging and complaining. And as for beauty? It fades for everyone who doesn't invest in expensive face lifts and collagen injections. A woman's heart grows more charming and beautiful over the years when she strives to fill her life with love for her family and others.

The Brothers' Anger

Song of Solomon 1:6b:

*"My mother's sons were angry with me;
They made me caretaker of the vineyards,*

But I have not taken care of my own vineyard."

The Shulammitte shares why the sun blackened her skin—she is a working girl who oversees her family's vineyards. But she is not finished with making plays on words as she confronts the lily-white Virgins:

The word picture of the burning rays of the sun also ties together the following line, where the female's brothers act in hostility toward her. She uses a form of the verb meaning "to burn, be angry" to describe how they became angry. This is the idiom of burning in rage. Thus, the wordplay of verbs connects the fire of her brothers with the heat of the sun to produce her dark skin. And the sun's stare couples with the critical gaze of her companions [the Virgins] to tie together the whole picture. (Hess, *Song*, 57.)

Later the Maiden tells the Shepherd she wishes he were like a loving brother to her who nursed at her mother's breasts (Song 8:1). Although her brothers are extremely angry with her now, she knows they normally treat her with love and delight. By studying the historical background of Solomon's reign, we learn the brothers had plenty of reasons to be angry—not with her, but with the King. Solomon had taken over their lives. And like many people, they allowed their anger to destroy their patience. They took their frustration out on their sister when she didn't immediately agree to do what they wanted.

The Brothers Help Feed the King and His Harem

Some commentators find it hard to believe Solomon actually married 1000 women, saying they don't see how he could have kept so many women happy or even fed them. However, he set up a system of government to provide for his growing family. The first thing he did as king was to establish a residual income program better than any Internet get-rich-quick scheme.

He divided the country into twelve regions without respect for the twelve tribes except for the Levites, who took care of the temple. He set deputies over the twelve sections. Then he installed tax collectors. The tribes immediately lost influence and political power (1 Kings 4:1-7, 27). The amounts of food Solomon required for just one day were staggering:

Each of the twelve sections were responsible for furnishing food for one month each year. Solomon fed thousands at his table including employees and his wives along with their children and relatives. Additionally, the Israelites provided straw and barley for his horses each month. The provision needed for *one day* by Solomon's court "was thirty cors [188 bushels] of fine flour, and sixty cors [about 370 bushels] of meal, ten fat oxen, and twenty pasture-fed cattle, a hundred sheep, besides harts, gazelles, roebucks, and fatted fowl... And those officers [in charge]...let nothing be lacking. Barley also and straw for the horses and swift steeds they brought to the place where it was required, each according to his charge." And this was only part of the taxation. (*Great People of the Bible and How They Lived* [Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest Association, Inc, 1979], 187-188.)

Thus, Solomon designed an ingenious organization for a young king who indulged himself in deflowering virgins, horticulture and botany, and building projects. With his government installed soon after he was crowned king, he enjoys plenty of free time to pursue his obsessions in grandiose style. As his government became more bloated, his taxation program became more burdensome each year.

The magnitude of the tax burden fell on the farmers and shepherds. It's easy to imagine the anger and resentment burning in the brothers' chests toward the playboy king who requires them to take care of his growing harem. But food was not the only taxation.

The Brothers Work on the King's Building Projects

Solomon also needed workers for his huge building projects—the temple, his palace, a home for his favorite wife, Pharaoh's daughter, and strategically placed cities for storing the collected foods. He began building the temple in the fourth year of his reign and it took seven years. Now into the sixth year of his reign, the temple is well underway. Solomon was known for his great building projects, which consumed most of his early years.

Over 150,000 of the old Canaanite slaves serve on the roads in the quarries. Then 30,000 drafted Israelites work as forced laborers. He sends them in relays of 10,000 to Lebanon to harvest trees. The men spend one month in the forests and then two months at home (1 Kings 5:13-18).

Including the food taxes, the Maiden's brothers would have been drafted for Solomon's building endeavors. This means they slave for Solomon four months out of every year. Thus, they are double taxed in providing both food and labor.

No doubt, this causes the brothers' anger to burn as they transfer their bitterness toward the King onto their sister. They need her to take charge of the vineyards while they are gone. The story doesn't mention her father, which many scholars believe indicates he was dead.

The Shulammite Is Caretaker of the Vineyards

Many think a woman's place is always in the home, and only in the home, while the man works in the fields. Our view is tainted by our remembrance of an unusual time in history. Immediately after World War II, husbands came home to take over supporting their families while their wives left the war factories to become stay-at-home moms during the golden age of the United States. Throughout much of history, women worked alongside their men to survive harsh economies.

During Solomon's reign, the country people lived on family compounds. The grandmothers provided loving daycare for the children including serving as wet nurses. The mothers often worked alongside the men.

Two other places in the Song of Solomon expand on the Shulammite's responsibilities as caretaker of the vineyards. They show she was not a common field laborer, but was the overseer when Solomon spied her. We will let the Maiden share those details when she's ready.

We also learn later she planned to get married in the spring and move to the Shepherd's home. This implies she was self-conscious about her dark skin before the Virgins started staring at her like a hawk stalking a field mouse. More than anything, she wants to be a beautiful bride for the Shepherd:

The adorning of the bride, was a very costly and elaborate affair. Much time was given to the preparation of her person. Every effort was put forth to make her complexion glossy and shining with a luster like unto marble. The words of David must have been their ideal for her: "that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace" (Psa. 144:12). (Wight, *Manners and Customs*, 130.)

Virgins spent a whole year preparing their trousseau and beautifying their skin. So when her brothers asked, then demanded, she change her wedding plans to oversee the care of the vineyards, she balked. We can just imagine the family dynamics of the boys being sent off for forced labor on Solomon's building project while the little sister had other plans than working in the hot sun every day.

As she took charge of the vineyards, she probably talked to herself in self-effacing puns about her predicament. So when the pale palace Virgins from Jerusalem with their made-up eyes looked at her with disdain, her words burst forth. "How dare you stare at me like the sun stares unmercifully at me!" Not only is her skin burnt black, she coins a swarthy reduplication to make fun of their ridicule. Does her voice betray her own anger at her brothers as she rants at the Virgins?

Her voice softens momentarily to inject some comic relief as she humorously calls her brothers, “my mother’s sons.” Then she continues her animated lecture. She changes the form of the blackened verb to ignite the raging fire in her brothers’ anger as they forced her to give up her plans and expose herself to the skin-darkening rays of the sun.

Understanding her brothers’ anger helps us appreciate the Maiden’s dilemma. If she accepts Solomon’s proposal of marriage, it will give her family a huge financial boost. She, her mother, brothers, and little sister will take their place at Solomon’s table alongside the other wives and their relatives. They will wear beautiful clothes. Her brothers can become gentleman farmers or even government employees. Wow! What a life Solomon offers the young Maiden toiling under the broiling sun.

“O You Whom My Soul Loves”

Song of Solomon 1:7a:

“Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, . . .”

“Soul” conveys “the sense of the life of a person, as in Lev. 17:11, where it is the ‘soul’ (*nepesh*) of the person that is in the blood. This is fundamentally the desire for life.” (Hess, *Song*, 103.)

“Loves” is a primary root which means “to have affection for (sexually or otherwise).” (Strong, *New*, 299.)

Today, instead of saying him “whom my soul loves,” we say, “My boyfriend is the love of my life.” In the first four verses revealing the Shulammitite’s dilemma, we see her sensory overload as she begins to teach the Virgins and us what true love is all about.

True love revolves around satisfying all five senses—touch, taste, smell, hear, and see. In the Maiden’s expression of her deep longing through her five senses we experience her emotional involvement with the Shepherd as she turns to him for comfort. In summary, true love is a satiation of the five senses with a deep intellectual and emotional commitment to the object of one’s affection.

Sensuous love also satisfies the five senses. However, it lacks an intellectual and emotional commitment to act in the other person’s best interest. Sensuous love seeks physical comfort for the self-absorbed person while ignoring the target’s emotional needs.

The Shulammitite wrestles with comparing true love with sensuous love throughout the story. She must sort out the differences between the way she and the Shepherd love each other in the context of how she and the King interact. This is the essence of the Song of Solomon.

Her energy spent on her outburst, her eyes and voice become syrupy. If the one she loves won’t come to her, then perhaps she should go to him. And so she moans.

“Where Do You Pasture Your Flock?”

Song of Solomon 1:7b:

“Where do you pasture your flock,

Where do you make it lie down at noon?

For why should I be like one who veils herself

Beside the flocks of your companions?”

Although the Maiden realizes the opportunity the King’s infatuation offers her, she loves the Shepherd. She still wants to run away, only now as she’s calmer, she proposes to run to the Shepherd instead of begging him to come to her. She yearns for him and wishes she could go with him instead of with the King. What a dilemma! Can her love for the Shepherd begin to compare with a life with the King—and the benefits for her family?

She asks, “Should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions?” In other words, “Should I do what all the girls do? Wander accidentally on purpose to where you and the other boys are?” Girls are the same from generation to generation. So she asks if she should act

coy and play hard to get. Should she just happen to walk by the place where he pastures his flocks with her veil innocently in place? Maybe then, he would notice her and rescue her from her dilemma. Or perhaps she should openly declare she is ready to forget the vineyards and marry him now, putting an end to their courtship and the intentions of the King? Before Solomon came along, she was sure what she wanted – now she isn't so sure.

The beloved is a successful shepherd. The expression “make it [his flock] lie down at noon” shows how well the Shepherd takes care of his sheep. For example, sheep refuse to lie down at noon to rest (1) if they feel the least bit hungry, (2) if disease or insects bother them, (3) if any kind of danger presents itself, or (4) if friction exists between their own social orders. (Keller, *Shepherd*, 35.)

A shepherd who makes his flock lie down at noon must prevent all four of these problems from happening. The Maiden describes the Shepherd as a hard, dependable worker. Besides, what better time to visit him than when his flocks are lying down, and he can give her some attention?

Solomon and the Shepherd are two distinct individuals. The Shulammitte asks, “Where are you? Where is the one whom my soul loves?” Solomon tells where he is at this time. He is inspecting his vineyard in the orchard of nut trees (Song 6:11). The vineyard is where he found her and where the two of them are right now. Later she says Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon, which he entrusted to caretakers (Song 8:11). Both Solomon and the Shulammitte are at the vineyard at Baal-hamon; the Shepherd or the beloved is the only one missing.

Yet the Maiden knows where the Shepherd is—he is pasturing his flocks. Later in the story when the Virgins ask where her beloved is, she doesn't tell them where Solomon is because they all know he's in the palace with her. In fact, the King soon shows up at his tent to continue trying to persuade her to marry him. Instead, she tells the Virgins her beloved is pasturing his flock among the lilies (Song 6:2). Unless Solomon can be in two places at the same time, the King and the Shepherd must be two different men, both in love with the Shulammitte.

The Shepherd is the “beloved.” In the two verses that tell where her boyfriend is, the Maiden also introduces the Shepherd as “you whom my soul loves” and “my beloved.” This is noteworthy because these two expressions appear thirty-four times in the Song of Solomon. Since she says the Shepherd is also the one her soul loves and her beloved, all of the beloved passages logically refer to the Shepherd – not to King Solomon.

Additionally, she says her beloved is watching over his flocks like his shepherd friends. Solomon isn't hanging out with shepherds. He's too busy pursuing women to worry about finding lost sheep.

Therefore, we don't need to arbitrarily decide if a speaker is Solomon or the Shepherd. All the beloved passages establish a clear pattern of the Maiden referring to the Shepherd. Some commentators switch back and forth between the beloved being either the Maiden or the Shepherd. But the beloved passages consistently refer to the Shepherd. The Maiden identifies herself as a vineyard keeper. Watch and see if this isn't the truth.

The Shulammitte's Freedom to Choose

*Song of Solomon 1:8:
“If you yourself do not know,
Most beautiful among women,
Go forth on the trail of the flock,
And pasture your young goats
By the tents of the shepherds.”*

“Beautiful” is the same Hebrew word throughout the Song of Solomon. The Virgins and Solomon frequently use this word. It means “fair, beautiful, excellent.... It denotes ‘beauty as to outward appearance.’” (*Theological Wordbook*, 391.)

After the Maiden's reprimand about her darkened skin and how her brothers forced her to work in the vineyards, the Virgins stop staring and begin praising her unique beauty. They use a stronger word for beautiful than the Maiden did. They call her "most beautiful among women."

Many people think Israelite parents forced their daughters to marry whomever they chose. Not true. For example, Rebekah's mother and brother gave her a choice about marrying Isaac (Genesis 24:57-58). After the age of 12, each girl made her own choice to either accept or reject the arrangements her parents made. But she still required her parents' approval of her choice until she turned 21.

For this reason, the Virgins assure the Shulammitte she is free to go to the Shepherd. If she wants to leave that badly, the King won't force himself on her. But since the King already showers his attentions on her, wouldn't it be better to find out what he wants before she makes her decision? Besides, she has smelled a fabulous meal cooking all afternoon, and it'll soon be time to eat with the King. She lingers.

Just as modern screenplays break for a commercial after a cliff hanger, the scene ends with the Shulammitte pondering whom to choose. The tent flap closes on the Maiden's bedroom and her indecision.

Study Exercise

Answer all questions in your own words.

1. What advice would you give young girls about being self-conscious about their appearance?
2. What advice would you give young boys about being self-conscious about their appearance?
3. How would most girls feel if a rich playboy asked them to marry him?
4. Should girls or women feel obligated to give sex to pay for an expensive meal and nice date?
5. How would you define the Shulammitte's dilemma?
6. Can you think of situations other than at single bars where boys or men might act like lusty horses, or sex fiends, around beautiful girls?
7. How did the peer pressure of the daughters of Jerusalem affect the Shulammitte when she wanted to leave Solomon's tent? How does peer pressure affect courting couples today?
8. In what ways was the Shepherd successful at taking care of his sheep?
9. Do you disagree with anything in the lesson? If so, explain giving scriptures for your reasons.

Research Exercise

True Love Versus Sensuous Love Charts: To help you analyze the difference between true and sensuous love start four charts. For each chart, make eight columns. Label the columns (1) Hear, (2) See, (3) Smell, (4) Taste, (5) Touch, (6) Intellectual Love, (7) Emotional Love, and (8) Sexual Love. As you go through the Song of Solomon analyze each of the following relationships on a separate chart:

1. The Shepherd Rates the Shulammitte
2. The Shulammitte Rates the Shepherd
3. Solomon Rates the Shulammitte
4. The Shulammitte Rates Solomon

On the charts, list each example in the Song of Solomon of satisfying the five senses plus intellectual and emotional love. Record examples of looking forward to the sexual relationship. Include the verses. This is a good chapter to start with the Shulammitte's five senses screaming at her as she longs for the Shepherd. Continue this exercise through the end of the Song of Solomon. When you finish, write a one to two page summary of the advantages and disadvantages of true love versus sensuous love. *Remember, the five senses plus intellectual, emotional, and sexual love equal true love. The five senses plus sexual attraction only equals sensuous love.*

Personal Exercise

Personal True Love Versus Sensuous Love Charts: Make two additional charts for yourself just like the charts above for the following:

1. Married: a chart for you and a chart for your mate
2. Single: a chart for you and your ideal future mate

If you put in the time to complete this exercise, you will be a different person by the time this study is over. Keep in mind that you are the only person you can change. However, by changing ourselves, we create an environment that makes it easier for the other person to make changes. The primary goal for doing the charts is to open your eyes to ways you can help love grow in your marriage.

Don't do the chart on your spouse to become an enabler or to walk on eggshells. If enabling is a problem, pay attention to the Maiden's strength of character for saying, "No," even when dealing with the most powerful political figure in the land.

Personal Exercise

Claim the Song of Solomon for yourself and make it a natural aspect of your thinking. Each week read the Song of Solomon beginning with chapter one and read up to your last class. Reading the verses many times during this study makes the story become more familiar. It also helps you better understand the overall storyline.

If your Bible makes it hard to understand the Song of Solomon, go to BibleGateway.com and read the book in other translations. Find a version that makes it easy for you to follow along in this beautiful book of poetry. You may want to print several versions to compare.

If you'll put in time reading the Song of Solomon, the events of your life will remind you of the Shulammitte, the Shepherd, or King Solomon. If you're a dating female, you'll begin to compare your boyfriends with the Shepherd and Solomon. You'll compare yourself to the Shulammitte. You'll ask, "What would the Shulammitte do? What would she say?"

If you're a dating male, you'll automatically compare your dates to the Shulammitte, the Virgins, and Solomon's 140 wives. You'll ask yourself if you're treating your date like the Shepherd or Solomon. We saw in the first chapter that teenage boys have the ability to go through as many women as Solomon did. Reading through the Song of Solomon every week will enable you to use it to protect you from Solomon's loneliness in the midst of 1000 wives.

And parents, you'll begin to examine your attitudes toward your mate and the kind of love residing in your home. You'll wonder if you're teaching your children as well as the Shulammitte's mother did. You'll become skillful at teaching your children how to lay a foundation for a happy marriage and a fulfilling love life by your example and your words.