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I Could'a Killed Him, Easy!
David is hunted by Saul in the hills
based on portions of 1 Samuel 22 - 24
by Ralph Milton

Legends grow with each telling. Legends of various sports and war heroes grow each time their stories are told by a bunch of guys over drinks in the pub. Especially tales like the one about David and Goliath, and this one about when King Saul ducked into a cave for a tinkle. David and his gang must have had a hundred laughs over this one.

At first he'd been scared out of his mind. David sat in that cave, cold, hungry, with no idea of what to do next.

He was a teenager, kicked out of the house by a sick and angry father. Well, Saul wasn't his father, of course, but it felt like that. David had been so close to the king for awhile. Saul and David and Jonathan, Saul's son. The three of them had been a family, really.

Then Saul's depression began. David said and did a few stupid things and soon they were yelling and throwing things at each other and the next thing David knew he was hiding out in a cave.

Alone.

At first David was desperately afraid. But he slowly became aware of others in the cave, and in nearby caves. Street kids mostly. A few sick old men. In trouble. Afraid. Lonely. Hungry.

It was fear that brought them together. And hunger. Sometimes they could steal or panhandle a bit of food, and they'd share it. Desperation breeds community.

David was a strong, bright kid. He was a natural leader. And it wasn't long before the tiny group of adolescents became a band of petty bandits held together by their common need for courage and for food. Today we would have called them a street gang.

Nobody mentioned the fear of course. "Look, meathead!" David would say to almost anyone. "I ain't afraid of nobody."

"Yeah, meathead!" The chorus echoed from the little band of frightened adolescents.

The little band grew and with it David's skills as leader. Unconsciously, he formed his little band into a skilled guerrilla army that could "liberate" a quantity of food and sometimes money from almost any local landholder. A protection racket, some called it. And sometimes they would share with the sick old men who were simply starving, or hungry villagers from nearby Bethlehem.

And David loved being the leader. For the first time since his argument with Saul, he felt almost OK.

There was a sense of home here. Affection. For every little triumph there were celebration hugs and slapping of palms and backsides. And they would brag and tease and tell each other lies and build the love young men will not acknowledge and never name.

Then one of King Saul's regiments would appear and send them scurrying back to their caves, running for their lives, reminding David how much he was hated and feared.

Still, late at night and deep inside the cave, crouched around a tiny fire, drinking stolen wine, David's bravery would rise. "I'm going to kill that old bastard," David would declare. And he'd fancitize assassination schemes deep into the night — schemes that seemed to melt back into fear with the sober light of dawn.

David's sharp eyes spotted the regiment just a moment before they would have seen him. "Duck!" he whispered to his followers. "That's Saul's flunkies. Quick. Inside that cave. If they start to come in, there's a way out the back we can crawl through."

With his little gang of outlaws, David cowered inside the dark cave. It wasn't long before they heard voices just outside. David recognized the voice of Saul, the king. "Hang on for a moment, men," he heard Saul say. "I need to pop in here for a moment."

Saul's eyes were adjusted to the brilliant desert sunlight so he saw nothing inside the cave. David's eyes could see Saul clearly silhouetted against the opening, undoing his cloak and relieving himself.

One of David's band nudged him, handed him a dagger, and gestured toward Saul. This was the moment. David knew that Saul's life was in his hands. All the anger flashed into his brain.

David had killed before and he could kill again. It would be so easy, and could be done so silently, sliding out the back entrance of the cave long before Saul's soldiers would come looking.

When David was a child he had often spoken to God who seemed to live with him there in the hills among the sheep. And with King Saul in the palace, he had known the elaborate and moving ritual of the Hebrew priests. In those first, fearful days alone in that cave, David had screamed his anger and fear at God. But since he'd sensed a bit of power in the company of his little band, the thought of God had hardly crossed his mind.

But here it was again. David was ready to eliminate his mortal enemy and the question — he knew it was God's question — pushed itself into his mind. "Is this right? Is it right to kill the Lord's anointed?"

David saw Saul's cloak there within his easy reach. He snipped off a large tassel, and motioned silence to his followers. Saul finished his toilet and left, quite unaware he'd come within one thought of dying.

David waited till Saul and his men had moved down a steep ravine and up the other side. Then he stood on top of a rock and yelled at them.

"Hey! Saul! Do you know who was in that cave with you when you were having a tinkle? I was! Look, I cut off one of your tassels. I could have cut off more than that, Saul." David gloried in the laughter of his friends behind him.

Late that night, over much wine and food, David and his band laughed over and over at that moment. "Did you see the old buzzard's face?" And the laughter rolled again and again and David felt good and brave. Still the need to boast was there, to prove to others and to himself the fear he felt was never there.

"I coulda off'd him," said David. "Easy. Too easy. I'm going to do it when I can fight him one on one. I'll show `em. "

"Yeah," said the brave little band. "We'll show `em."

One of the sick old winos put his hand on David's shoulder. "You did the right thing, kid. Keep it up. You'll be somebody."

Somebody? Who? David lay awake nights wondering about the questions – God's question that had stopped the killing – God's question that came through the wino. Questions that kept David wondering deep into the night, "Who am I? What is God calling me to be?"

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,
all of them available through Wood Lake Publishing.**

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