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SAUL I
(An excerpt from The Anointed, a forthcoming novel)

SHAWNA TROPP

King Saul's headaches afflicted his entire realm. Under their oppression, he forsook his civil duties, leaving the fledgling monarchy paralyzed. Beyond the ragtag army, there was as yet no bureaucracy to govern in the sovereign's stead. Had Prozac — even aspirin — existed, the priests doubtless would have tried it to relieve the throbbing pain. Instead, they sent him David. That was fatal.

You may well ask me how I know all this. Once, you see, I was the Witch of Endor. During his youth, Samuel (later the prophet Samuel) and I (for it was my youth, too) had had an intense affair, of which Saul somehow learned decades later. This was the reason that he sought me out to summon Samuel's ghost to speak to him of God, the nation and the crown — despite the witch hunts he himself had long before led at Samuel's behest. I warned the King against calling the prophet from his rest, but he persisted — and killed himself, as I had feared, the next day.

Lest I offend you by giving away the story, let me remind you that you know it anyway, even if your memory of it has dimmed. Some of what I'll tell you, though, you may not know: that God, in His strange evolution, fell in love for the first time. With David, of course; everyone fell in love with that spoiled brat, his treacheries notwithstanding. I myself was not immune, less for his copper curls and turquoise eyes than his poetic gifts. But God? It was a novel case.

Not that God ever loved Saul in any way. When the Hebrew first clamoured for a king, he was offended that they wanted to be like other nations, that they should long for an authority more secular than spiritual. Nonetheless, it was strange that He should choose as His first King someone He loved so little — indeed,
the one man in the whole of ancient Israel whom He drove to suicide. True, one hates the person one has hurt; it is part of the process of self-justification for having hurt the person to begin with. Even God resorted to it, just as much as did both Saul and David with each other. There lies the heart of the matter — or, at least, my knowledge of it.

Ms. Tropp is also the author of Daughter of the Sun, a gripping novel about Hatshepsut, "the world's first great woman sovereign" and "the sole woman to assume the Double Crown of the Nile Delta and Nubia."

The writer has written for the United Nations in Europe, Africa, and the United States. She now lives in New York City.