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FOUNDED ON THE APOCRYPHAL BOOK OF JUDITH ***

JUDITH

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

Founded on the apocryphal book of "Judith"

BY

ARNOLD BENNETT

LONDON

1919

First published April 30, 1919

NOTE

This play was presented for the first time at the Devonshire Park Theatre, Eastbourne, on Monday, April 7th, 1919, with the following cast:

Judith	LILLAH MCCARTHY
Haggith	ESMÉ HUBBARD
Rahel	MADGE MURRAY
Ozias	CAMPBELL GULLAN
Holofernes	CLAUDE KING
Bagoas	ERNEST THESIGER
Achior	GEOFFREY DOUGLAS
Chabris	E.H. PATERSON
Charmis	FEWLASS LLEWELLYN
Ingur	FREDERICK VOLPE
Messenger	FELIX AYLMER
Soldier	CLIFFORD MOLLISON
Attendant	EDWIN OXLEE

The play was produced by WILFRED EATON

CHARACTERS

Hebrews

JUDITH

HAGGITH, her waiting-woman

RAHEL

OZIAS, Governor of Bethulia

CHABRIS, an elder

CHARMIS, an elder

A SOLDIER

A MESSENGER

Assyrians

HOLOFERNES, General of the Assyrian armies

BAGOAS, his chief eunuch

ACHIOR, a captain

INGUR, a soldier

AN ATTENDANT ON BAGOAS

ACT I

A street in the city of Bethulia

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ACT II

SCENE I. *The valley near the Assyrian camp. Time, morning; two days later.*

SCENE II. *The tent of Holofernes. Time, later, the same morning.*

SCENE III. *The same. Time, the same night.*

ACT III

SCENE I. *Same as Act I. Time, later, the same night.*

SCENE II. *The same. Time, the next day.*

ACT I

A street in the city of Bethulia in Judea. Bethulia is in the hill country, overlooking the great plain of Jezreel to the south-west. Back, the gates of the city, hiding the view of the plain. Right, Judith's house, with a tent on the roof. Left, houses. The street turns abruptly, back left, along the wall of the city. Left centre, a built-up vantage-point, from which the plain can be seen over the gates.

TIME: *Fifth century B.C.*

Towards evening.

Ozias is standing alone in the street, drinking from a leathern bottle. Enter Chabris, back left.

OZIAS (*quickly, but with perfect calmness, hiding the bottle in his garments*). Old man! It is years since I saw you. How came you past the guard, old man?

CHABRIS. Old? Old? I am not yet a hundred. Who are you?

OZIAS. Ozias.

CHABRIS. Ah! So this is Ozias, the son of Ezbon. Before your father could walk I have nursed him on my knee; and he was filled like the full moon—with naughtiness.

OZIAS. What has brought you at last out of your house? Are you come to prophesy once more?

CHABRIS. I have given up prophesying.

OZIAS. A profession full of risks.

CHABRIS. I pass my endless days in meditation and solitude.

OZIAS. That sounds much safer. How comely is the wisdom of old men!

CHABRIS. And what do you do, sprig?

OZIAS. Has none told you?

CHABRIS. I see nobody but my daughter's granddaughter, and her I forbid to speak to me, because being a woman she has the tongue of a woman, and a woman's tongue is unfavourable to meditation. How should I be told?

OZIAS. I am the governor of this great city of Bethulia.

CHABRIS. You are responsible for this city?

OZIAS. I am.

CHABRIS. Now I understand my misfortune. And the truth was in me when I said to your mother as she lay dying: Better it is to die without children than to have them that are ungodly.

OZIAS. Oh! How comely a thing is the judgment of grey hairs!

CHABRIS. You ask me what has brought me at last out of my house. I will tell you. Thirst! Thirst has brought me out of my house. Every morning and every evening my great-grandchild serves me with pulse and water. For five days she has furnished less and less water, and this day—not a drop! Can one eat pulse without water to drink? Half an hour ago I went to her to reason with her, and she lay on her bed cracked, and raved that she herself had not drunk for three days and that there was no water left in all Bethulia. So I came at last out of my house into the streets of this city famous for its cool fountains which never fail. And lo! I meet the governor of this city, and he is Ozias! Ozias! Seven days do men mourn for him that is dead, but for an ungodly man all the days of his life! Why is there no water in Bethulia, sprig?

OZIAS. Old man, meditation is good and solitude is good, but think not because you sit staring all day at your own belly that the sun and stars have ceased to revolve round the earth and the kings of this world to make war. Is it possible that you do not know what has happened?

CHABRIS. I only know that I cannot eat pulse without water to drink.

OZIAS. Bethulia is besieged.

CHABRIS. Who is besieging Bethulia?

OZIAS. Holofernes.

CHABRIS. I have never heard his name. Who is he?

OZIAS. Never heard the name of the chief captain of Nebuchadnezzar? Have you heard the name of Nebuchadnezzar, by chance?

CHABRIS. I seem to remember it.

OZIAS. Come up here. (*They go up the steps to the vantage-point.*) Look! A hundred and twenty thousand foot-soldiers. Twelve thousand archers on horseback. Oxen and sheep for their provisions. Twenty thousand asses for their carriages. Camels without number. Infinite victuals;

and very much gold and silver. The like was never seen before.

CHABRIS (*stepping down.*) Why has Nebuchadnezzar set about this thing? What harm has Bethulia done to him?

OZIAS. Much harm. Nebuchadnezzar has decided to be God. He has decreed that all nations and tribes shall call upon him as God. And he has conquered the whole earth, excepting only Judea; and Bethulia is the gate into Judea, and Bethulia has not listened to his decree, and I am the governor of Bethulia. So Nebuchadnezzar the great king is very angry and Holofernes is the tool of his wrath.

CHABRIS (*going up the steps again and gazing.*) How many did you say?

OZIAS. A hundred and twenty thousand foot and twelve thousand horse.

CHABRIS. At any rate this will be the last war.

OZIAS. Why?

CHABRIS. Why! Because plainly war cannot continue on such a scale. Or if it does, mankind is destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar has rendered war ridiculous.

OZIAS (*laughs; then half to himself, sarcastically.*) What is heavier than lead, and what is the name thereof, but an aged fool?

CHABRIS (*descending again, self-centred.*) It remains that I cannot eat pulse without water to drink. (*To Ozias.*) And surely Bethulia has more wells than any other city of Judea.

OZIAS. The wells are at the foot of the hills, and Holofernes has seized them all.

CHABRIS. That is not fighting.

OZIAS. It is war.

CHABRIS. No, no! In my time soldiers fought fairly.

OZIAS. And killed each other. Why should Holofernes sacrifice thousands of lives to take the heights when he can reach the same result by letting his men sit still and watch?

CHABRIS. I say this is not war. Once I travelled many days to Nineveh. It is a city of extravagance, and when I beheld its mad, new-fangled ways, I knew that the last day was nigh. I was right. Three thousand and five hundred years since Jehovah created Adam, and Eve from his rib ... Too long! Too long! And what is pulse without water? I must have water.

OZIAS. It is thirty-four days since Holofernes took the wells. If you have received water up to yesterday your great-grandchild must indeed have thirsted that you might drink. I have distributed water by measure, but now the cisterns are empty, and women and young men fall down in the streets, and there is no water in Bethulia. We are all in like case, the high and the lowly.

CHABRIS. Then give me your bottle.

OZIAS. What bottle?

CHABRIS. I saw you put it from your lips as I came.

OZIAS. It behoves you to understand, old man, that my solemn duty as governor is to maintain my own strength, for if I fell the city would fall. Without me to inspire them the populace would yield in a moment. What is the populace? Poltroons, animals, sheep, rabbits, insects, lice!

CHABRIS. Give me the bottle.

OZIAS. It is as empty as the cisterns.

CHABRIS. Give it to me, or I will cry through the streets that you are concealing water. (*Ozias gives him the bottle. Chabris drinks. Ozias snatches the bottle away and conceals it.*) Ah!

(*A figure is glimpsed in the tent on the roof of Judith's house. Ozias starts.*)

CHABRIS. What is that up yonder?

OZIAS. Nothing.

CHABRIS. Whose house is this?

OZIAS. It is the house of Judith, the daughter of Merari.

CHABRIS. Ah! Merari, the son of Ox, the son of Oziel—Oziel and I were little playful boys together—the son of Elcia, the son of Raphaim, the son of Eliab, the son of Nathanael, the son of

OZIAS. Old man, your memory is terrible. Have pity!

CHABRIS. The draught has revived me. So Merari married and had a daughter. What manner of woman is she?

OZIAS. She is the widow of Manasses, who died of the heat in the barley harvest. And she is childless. And she is very rich; for Manasses left her gold and silver and menservants and maid-servants and cattle and lands. And she has remained a widow in her house three years and four months, and never has she come forth. And there is none to give her an ill word, for she fears the Lord greatly.

CHABRIS. Yes. But what *manner* of woman is she?

OZIAS. She is beautiful to behold.

CHABRIS (*to himself*). Oh! *That* manner of woman!

OZIAS. And she has fasted all the days of her widowhood, except the eves of the Sabbaths and the Sabbaths, and the eves of the new moons and the new moons, and the feasts and solemn days of the House of Israel.

CHABRIS. You are most deeply versed in her life. Is she exceeding beautiful?

OZIAS. She is exceeding beautiful.

CHABRIS. Then it was she who *peeped* (*with a peculiar emphasis on the word*) from the tent a moment since.

OZIAS. Old man, you have eyes.

CHABRIS. It is the draught of water.

OZIAS. She is said to take the air in her tent daily at this hour.

CHABRIS (*accusingly*). And that is why you are here, Ozias.

OZIAS. No! I come here to reflect upon my plans for the saving of the city, and because of this vantage-point, to view the army of the Assyrians.

CHABRIS. This vantage-point is new since my day. You have built it here, not to see the Assyrians, but to see Judith. And that is why you have set a guard to keep the street empty.

OZIAS. And if it be so, what then? Old man, you are so old that to confess in your ear is sweet, like murmuring secrets into the grave. If I do come to this place to watch for the marvellous vision of Judith, what then?

CHABRIS. What then? And the populace of Bethulia dying of thirst?

OZIAS. The populace!... Mice! Rats! Beetles! (*He makes the motion of crushing with his foot.*)

CHABRIS. Yet the city is doomed. You can have no hope.

OZIAS. No hope? Am I then a dead body? Am I a rotting corpse? True, the city will be taken, and when the city is taken I may be killed. But in your meditations, old man, has it not occurred to you that death must be highly interesting? Or I may be seized for a slave. But either I should cease speedily to be a slave, or I should become the most powerful slave in Babylon. (*Reflectively.*) We might be enslaved together.

CHABRIS. Who?

OZIAS. Judith and I. The history of the world is full of miracles. Meanwhile, I live, and the strong savour of life inflames my nostrils; and the ever-increasing magnificence and terror of war is like wine in my mouth. I shake with delight at the vastness and the mystery of the future.... And there is woman!

CHABRIS. I feel I can eat my pulse now.

OZIAS. There is still woman.

A fracas is heard, back. Enter Rahel, running, followed by two soldiers and a mixed group of Bethulians, including Charmis, an elder.

RAHEL (*to Chabris, like a termagant*). Why did you go forth alone, grandad, frightening me when I looked and could not find you? At your age! Come back with me this moment.

CHABRIS. Ay! There is still woman!

OZIAS (*angrily, to first soldier*). Did I not give an order to bar the street?

FIRST SOLDIER. My lord, some of these are elders of high authority, and would pass. As for the girl—

RAHEL (*to Chabris*). This moment! (*She faints and falls.*)

CHABRIS (*indifferently, as Charmis moves towards Rahel*). Let her lie. She will come to of herself—or not, as God wills.

OZIAS (*to the soldiers, with cold fierceness*). Get back to your places. (*Exeunt soldiers.*)

CHARMIS (*looking at Ozias and indicating Rahel*). She is the fourteenth I have seen faint from thirst in the streets this day.

OZIAS (*soothingly*). Alas! And you or I may be the next. We are all in like case. But what is to be done?

(*Confused feeble exclamations from the group of citizens: 'We want to know. We are come for that. There is but one thing to be done.'*)

OZIAS (*still soothingly*). Who among you will be the spokesman?

CHARMIS. We are all spokesmen.

OZIAS. Even the children?

CHARMIS. Even the children. In our extremity we are all spokesmen.

OZIAS. But not all at once. Will you begin, honourable Charmis? You know that I am the servant of the citizens.

CHARMIS (*nervously oratorical*). Lord Ozias, may the God of Israel judge between us and you, for you have done us a great injury. (*Looks round for approval. The group approves.*)

OZIAS. An injury? I? Have I not said that I am the servant of the citizens?

CHARMIS (*more confidently*). And I say again that you have done us a great injury, in that you have not asked peace of the Assyrians. For we have no helper, and the God of Israel has sold us into the hands of the Assyrians. We are thrown down before them with thirst and with great destruction. Therefore now we demand—(*looks round*)—I say we demand that you call the Assyrians, and deliver the whole city for a spoil to the people of Holofernes and to all his army. For it is better for us to be made a spoil than to die of thirst. We will be the slaves of Holofernes, so that our souls may live and so that we may not see the death of our infants before our eyes, nor our wives nor our children die. (*A mother in the group convulsively seizes her child. Pause. Ozias walks about.*) We take to witness against you the heaven and the earth and our God and the God of our fathers, which punishes us according to our sins and the sins of our fathers; and we demand of you that you deliver up the city to Holofernes and his host. (*A silence.*)

(*Ozias ascends solemnly to the vantage-point.*)

OZIAS (*dominating the assembly*). Friends, it would seem that Charmis has made an end. His words are excellent and full of pity. Who follows him? Who will speak next? My ear waits. (*A silence.*) Ah! Then give heed. The words of Charmis are full of pity, but I also have pity. Do not I too cherish our women, and our maidens and our young children? And because I pity I would not yield to the monster Holofernes. Yes, the monster! This is not war that he wages. Once our enemy strove fairly with the warriors of Israel. Now he makes our women and children to die of thirst. The magnificence of war is gone from the earth, and Holofernes by the excess of his hosts has rendered war ridiculous. (*Chabris raises his hands.*) The peoples of the earth will perceive that henceforward the institution of war cannot continue, and after this there will be no more war. But meanwhile, if I go crouching to the feet of Holofernes, what will happen and what will come to pass? Surely it will come to pass that the monster who has sat down to watch us die of thirst will slay our little children and our old men, and dishonour our women, and ravish our innocent virgins; for the enslaving of the conquered will not content his anger nor satisfy the lust of his great hosts. Shall these things be? I say they shall not be. But what am I, save the servant of the citizens of Bethulia? And what do I speak, save the thought that is in your hearts? There is no cowardice in you. You are not sheep, nor rabbits, nor beetles, nor lice. You are valiant men, and women lion-hearted. Without you I am naught, and if I defy Holofernes, my fortitude is yours and my resolve springs from you. Charmis has invoked the holy name of the God of Israel. Let Israel not forget its God, for never has the Most High forsaken Israel. Brethren, be of good courage. Let us yet endure five days. Five short days. And if these days pass and the God of Israel turn not his mercy towards us, then will I do according to the word of Charmis. Such is my oath to you. And so it shall be.

Haggith *enters from the house of Judith.*

HAGGITH. My lord Ozias!

OZIAS (*quickly descending the steps*). What say you?

HAGGITH. My mistress, the lady Judith, will speak with you. She comes.

RAHEL (*half rising*). Water!

OZIAS (*excited*). The lady Judith comes out of her house after three years.

VOICES IN THE GROUP (*excited and impressed*). Judith is coming, after three years! Judith! The widow!

OZIAS (*sternly to the group*). Get hence, everyone to his own charge. Soldiers! Clear the street! (*Two soldiers advance, running to obey.*) The men to the walls and towers. The women and children to their houses. (*To Rahel, who has risen, indicating Chabris.*) Take the aged fool away, girl. (*Ruthlessly and contemptuously.*) Get home, all of you. Rabble! Insects! Lice!

(*The street is cleared, not without difficulty, and Ozias is left alone with Haggith.*)

After a pause, Judith enters slowly, in widow's apparel and sackcloth.

(Exit Haggith *into the house.*)

JUDITH. Greetings, Lord Ozias.

OZIAS. Lady, greetings. (*They salute.*)

JUDITH. Where are the people?

OZIAS. I invited them to go away.

JUDITH. Why?

OZIAS. Your waiting-woman said that you would speak with me.

JUDITH. But what I have to say I would have said before them.

OZIAS. Forgive your servant.

JUDITH. No! It is I, the woman, who should ask to be absolved.

OZIAS. I beseech you—

JUDITH (*simply*). Perhaps you dismissed the people because it is not meet for them to see all the workings of the mind which has authority over them.

OZIAS (*warmly responsive*). Ah! Lady! In your wisdom and your understanding you have comprehended what it is to be the governor of a besieged city. You, alone!

JUDITH. This is a day memorable beyond all the days of Bethulia.

OZIAS. It is a day memorable beyond all the days of Bethulia—because Judith, the widow of Manasses, has issued from her house and from her secrecy, and because after long years she has lightened the city with her countenance.

JUDITH (*smiling*). We hold converse with words, but the shadow of destruction is over us, and our hearts are darkened, and we hide our hearts in speech. Ozias, governor of Bethulia, show me your heart.

OZIAS. I dare not.

JUDITH. Dare! I am not afraid.

OZIAS. YOU are more beautiful than aforesaid—were it possible.

JUDITH (*accepting the compliment*). And if I am?

OZIAS. That is what is in my heart! Behold my heart, and the depths of my heart. Look deep, and deeper, and still you will see naught therein but the beauty and the subtlety of Judith.

JUDITH. It is no common man that with the parched tongue of thirst can talk thus while unspeakable calamity assails the city.

OZIAS. It is Ozias.

JUDITH (*gently*). I came not to meet Ozias, but the governor of Bethulia. From my tent I hearkened to the words which he spoke to the people, and the Lord said to me: Go down to him, thou, a woman. And I am here.

OZIAS. The Lord reigns! That which I said to the people did not please the ear of Judith?

JUDITH. No.

OZIAS. I spoke to the people according to their understanding. Have you not said it is not meet for the people to know the thoughts of the ruler? Hearken again? And I will speak now to the wise woman. I flattered the people with vain praise of their courage, when they have no courage. I affrighted the people with a prophecy of terror, when there is no terror—for Holofernes is a great warrior, and has compassion in his greatness, for he is a Babylonian. I gave them hope of succour when succour is none—for, with a hundred and twenty thousand footmen and twelve thousand horse against us (*with dry humour*) to count upon the mercy of the Lord is presumption.

JUDITH (*moves aside and returns. Sweetly*). Why then did you speak thus to the people? And to what end did you deceive them? I beseech you yet again to show me your heart, for it is right that I should know.

OZIAS. I saw the vastness of the future as in a vision. If the God of Israel perchance is merciful, and the city is saved at the eleventh hour, then it will be said in Jerusalem that there is none like Ozias of Bethulia for steadfastness, for he alone by his ardour revived the fainting populace and held firm the city; and great will be my recompense.... But that is a dream. Always I have faced the substance of things, and the substance is that Nebuchadnezzar has decreed to rule over the whole earth, and from the east to the west there is no living man that shall not bow down before Nebuchadnezzar. Bethulia will fall. I, the governor, shall be taken captive and shown to Nebuchadnezzar, and in that day Holofernes shall say to Nebuchadnezzar: Lo! Here is Ozias the Israelite who resisted thy mighty armies for thirty-four days and yet five days more. Use him if it seem good to thee. And I shall be lifted up to be a satrap of Nebuchadnezzar, and I shall partake of the bright glory of Nebuchadnezzar. And—(*hesitates.*)

JUDITH (*subtly and sweetly*). And?

OZIAS (*in an outburst*). What am I without you, O Judith? Before Manasses loved you, did I not love you? For three years have I not watched over you in all honour and respect, and troubled you not with my importunity until this day, which is the day of days? What am I without you, and what shall be my dominion and my satrap's throne if you do not sit in majesty by my side, O Rose of Sharon and matchless among women?

Judith (*as before*). My lord, you are like a rushing river.

OZIAS. You have seen my heart.

JUDITH. I have seen it.

OZIAS. And what say you?

There is the sudden sound of a disturbance. Enter, from back, soldiers, holding Achior, and a group of excited citizens. Haggith appears at the house-door.

OZIAS (*fiercely*). What! Are my commands no more than the wind in the corn, and is there to be naught but tumult within the walls of this city?

VOICES IN THE GROUP. An Assyrian! An Assyrian!

FIRST SOLDIER. Lord Ozias! We saw this man lying bound at the foot of the hill, and we descended and loosed him and brought him privily into Bethulia by the secret way. And now we present him to my lord.

OZIAS. Fools! Then no longer is the secret way secret.

VOICES. Slay him! Stone him! Whip the dog!

JUDITH (*nobly scornful, to the crowd*). Oh! Brave! Oh! Men of courage and high valour!

OZIAS (*to Achior*). Who are you?

ACHIOR. Achior.

OZIAS. Your condition?

ACHIOR (*with calm, genial candour*). Captain of all the Ammonites in the army of Holofernes.

JUDITH. Let them loose him, Lord Ozias. His eyes are not the eyes of treachery.

OZIAS (*to the soldiers*). Loose him. (*To Achior.*) And how come you here? Speak the truth—and fear.

ACHIOR. My mouth shall say truth, but I will not fear.

OZIAS. My hand is terrible.

ACHIOR. Thus it happened. When the children of Israel had shut up the passages of the hill country and had fortified all the tops of the high hills, Holofernes was very angry. And he called the captains of Ammon and said to them: Tell me now, ye sons of Chanaan, who these Israelites are that dwell in the hill country, and wherein is their power and strength, and why they have determined not to come and meet me, more than all the inhabitants of the west? And I, Achior, answered the question of Holofernes.

OZIAS. And what answer gave you?

ACHIOR. I said to Holofernes: This people is descended of the Chaldeans. But they left the way of their ancestors and would not follow the gods of their fathers; and they worshipped the God of heaven. So they were cast out from the face of the gods of Chaldea, and they fled into Mesopotamia. And they came to Chanaan. But when a famine covered all the land of Chanaan they went down into Egypt, and the king of Egypt brought them low with labouring in brick and made them slaves. Then they cried to their God, and he smote all the land of Egypt with plagues.... And God dried the Red Sea for them.

VOICES. It is true. It is true!

ACHIOR. And they came to Chanaan, and drove before them the inhabitants of that land, and they dwelt in that country many days. And while they sinned not before their God they prospered, because the God that hates iniquity was with them.

VOICES. It is true.

ACHIOR. But when they departed from the way which their God appointed, then they were destroyed in many battles very sore, and were led captives into a land that was not theirs, and the temple of their God was cast to the ground.

VOICES. Gentile dog! Shall we not render him to pieces?

JUDITH. There is but one truth, brethren, whether it please or whether it displease.

OZIAS (*to Achior*). Make an end.

ACHIOR. And I said to Holofernes: But now this people are returned to their God, and have possessed Jerusalem, and are seated in the hill country. (*With more emphasis.*) And I said further to Holofernes: Now therefore, my lord and governor, if there be any error in this people, let us go up and we shall overcome them. But if there be no iniquity in their nation, let my lord now pass by, lest their Lord defend them and we become a reproach before all the world.

JUDITH. It was well said.

OZIAS. Lady, it was well said—if the slave said it. (*To Achior.*) I demanded of you: How came you *here*?

ACHIOR. Thus. When I had finished speaking to Holofernes, all they that were about my lord and governor rose up in wrath and cried: Kill him. And the face of Holofernes darkened, and he said: And who art thou, Achior, that thou hast prophesied among us to-day that we should not make war with the people of Israel because of their God? And who is God but Nebuchadnezzar? Nebuchadnezzar by my hand will destroy the Israelites, and their God shall not deliver them. Their mountains shall be drunken with their blood and their fields shall be filled with their dead bodies. (*The citizens show alarm.*) And thou, Achior, shalt be delivered up to the Israelites in Bethulia, and when thou seest me again thou shalt fall among the slain.... And he commanded his servants, and they took me, and carried me secretly to the foot of the hill of Bethulia. And here am I!

OZIAS (*after a pause, positively*). It is a wicked device for our undoing.

JUDITH. How so?

OZIAS. Plainly this fellow lies, and he has come subtly with a tale to spy out our strength. Presently he will seek to escape from us again to the Assyrians.

VOICES. Spy! Stone him! Rend him!

ACHIOR (*to Ozias*). To Holofernes, my lord and governor, I spoke truth; and to you also I speak truth. Never has my mouth lied, nor my tongue uttered deceit. If death is ordained for my recompense, so be it.

JUDITH (*to Ozias*). He is a fair youth, and has spoken truly and feared not.

OZIAS (*with meaning*). Lady, he is a fair youth, and fearless. But by what sign know you that he has spoken truly?

JUDITH. By the glance of his eyes I know.

OZIAS. It is a sign that suffices not. Shall it be said that Ozias was deceived, and shall Ozias imperil his renown, by reason of the glance of a youth when he looks at a woman—even you?... And if he lies not, then he is a fool and his folly was great.

ACHIOR. I spoke the truth to Holofernes.

OZIAS (*fiercely*). But to speak truth did not content you. Having answered Holofernes, you must needs offer counsel to your lord and governor! Who were you to offer counsel to the greatest of all the captains of the earth? The protection of the mighty conqueror covered you, and lo! in your folly did you estrange yourself from him. Fool!

ACHIOR. I said to Holofernes, my lord and governor, that which I was appointed to say—that, no more and no less.

OZIAS. And who appointed you to say that which you said?

JUDITH. If there be a God in Israel, and if the Lord has not abandoned us, may not this youth be the messenger of the Most High to bring us comfort, and for a warning to the vainglory of Holofernes?

OZIAS (*with irony*). All is possible to the Lord. Yet may his purposes be hidden from us. (*To the soldiers.*) Until the Lord vouchsafe new wisdom to me, his servant, bind fetters about the feet of Achior, and take him to the house of bondage, and set a guard over him, for a spy is not more dangerous than a fool.

CHARMIS (*springing forward*). It shall be done, Ozias.

(*The soldiers begin to put chains on Achior.*)

JUDITH (*quietly*). Shame him not with fetters, lord Ozias.

OZIAS (*after a pause, to the soldiers*). Unbind him! (*The soldiers obey.*) Take him off! Speedily! Away! All! Let none remain! Hasten, I say!

(*Exeunt back, all except Ozias and Judith. As he goes Achior kisses Judith's robe.*)

JUDITH (*to Achior, as he does so*). Truth-teller!

(*At a sign from Judith, Haggith re-enters the house.*)

OZIAS. Your face is turned from me, because of the youth. Yet you came out to see the governor of the city, and the governor could do no other than I have done.

JUDITH (*looking at him*). Ozias, you have shown me your heart.

OZIAS. Yea!

JUDITH. And in the moment when the youth came you asked of me my counsel.

OZIAS. Yea!

JUDITH. Hear me now, for the words you have spoken before the people this day are not right.

OZIAS. What words?

JUDITH. This promise that you have uttered to deliver the city to our enemies, unless within five days the Lord turn to help. Who are you that seek to stand instead of God among the children of men?

OZIAS. Stand instead of God!

JUDITH. Who are you that have tempted God this day? For you cannot find the depth of the heart of man,—how then shall you search out God or comprehend his purpose? Brother, provoke not the Lord our God to anger. For if he will not help us within these five days, he has power to defend us when he will, even every day. Do not bind the counsels of God. For God is not as man that he may be threatened, neither as the son of man that he should be wavering. Therefore let us wait for salvation from him, and he will hear our voice,—if it please him. Moreover, this city is the key and the gateway to all Judea. If it be obstinate in resistance, Judea is not defiled, but if it be taken the whole land shall lie waste and God will require the profanation of it at our mouth.

OZIAS. All that you have spoken is truth, and there is none to gainsay your words. From the beginning of your days we have known your wisdom, and your understanding is manifest.... (*With significance.*) But we are thirsty.

JUDITH. If we are thirsty, let us give thanks to the Lord our God, who tries us, even as he did our fathers.

OZIAS. The people in the extremity of their thirst compelled me to an oath, which I will not break.

JUDITH. Say you the people, Ozias? As for them, you hold them lightly, and they are as naught in your eyes. So much you have avowed.

OZIAS (*in a new tone*). It is true. This day I hold the people lightly. But when the great madness and desperation of thirst comes at last upon them, who shall hold them? In that day they will seize the things forbidden, and they will drink the wine sanctified and reserved for the priests that serve the Lord. And to avert from me the wrath of Joachim, the high priest of Jerusalem, I have sent already a messenger to Jerusalem to bring a licence that this matter may be lawful.

JUDITH (*shocked*). Nay!

OZIAS. I say it will be so.

JUDITH. It shall not be so.

OZIAS. Then pray you to the Most High for the city, even for all of us, and the Lord will send rain for our cisterns and we shall faint no more. Pray, for you are a godly woman, and the God of Israel shall listen.

JUDITH (*with supreme impressiveness*). Hear me again, Ozias. This night I will do a thing which shall go throughout all the generations to the children of Israel. You shall stand this night in the gate of the city, and I will go forth from the city with my waiting-woman; and within the days that you have promised to deliver the city to our enemies the Lord will visit Israel by my hand.

OZIAS. On what errand will you go?

JUDITH. Enquire not of my act, for I will not declare it until the things are finished that I do. But this I declare, that the Lord has inclined himself to me, and now he has sent Achior for a sign.

OZIAS. You go to Holofernes!

JUDITH. To Holofernes.

OZIAS. Do not go!

JUDITH. But why shall I not go?

OZIAS. The perils of the heathen will surround you, and harm will surely befall you, for Holofernes will work lamentable evil upon you. And I cannot suffer it.

JUDITH (*smiling*). Did not Ozias say that Holofernes was a great warrior and had compassion in his greatness?

OZIAS (*insistent*). I cannot suffer it, for if any shame come upon you I will not live.

JUDITH. God will not see his handmaid shamed. Moreover I regard not myself in this thing, but the welfare of the people of Israel.

OZIAS (*kneeling*). Judith, I entreat you! For you are the light of my eyes, and without you the world is not.

JUDITH (*softly*). I know it. Think you that in these years I have not seen the depths of your heart, Ozias? Think you that I was blind in my tent? Think you that I watched not upon you? You were comely in my sight. But this day you have revealed your pride. For you seek not God, but the vanity of the earth, and you would make all Israel the instrument of your glory, denying the Lord. And I am sad.

OZIAS. Forgive me, Rose of Sharon.

JUDITH (*softly*). Who am I, to forgive my brother? Peace be upon you! (*She turns towards her house.*)

OZIAS (*rising*). Stay!

JUDITH. I go to prepare myself for that which I have to do. (*Exit into the house.*)

(*A soldier shows himself, back.*)

OZIAS. Friend!

FIRST SOLDIER (*approaching and saluting*). Lord! Your command!

OZIAS. Send to me the officer of the watch.

FIRST SOLDIER. Lord, the honourable lieutenant lies sick.

(*Haggith appears at the door of the house.*)

OZIAS. Thirst has overcome him?

FIRST SOLDIER (*bowing*). He raves on the bed, lord, and his tongue is like the tongue of a dog.

OZIAS. Who then commands the watch by the watchfires this night?

FIRST SOLDIER. I, lord. The watchfires wait the torch.

OZIAS. Will you, too, faint, and will your tongue be like the tongue of a dog?

FIRST SOLDIER (*grimly*). Not mine, lord.

OZIAS. DO the people complain?

FIRST SOLDIER. Lord, they whine and snivel mightily.

Enter Haggith with a small sack.

OZIAS. Is the secret way shut?

FIRST SOLDIER. Shut and barred, lord.

OZIAS. It must be opened.... Stand! I will see to it.

FIRST SOLDIER. AS my lord wills.

OZIAS. Has the watch aught to drink?

FIRST SOLDIER. My lord knows that no drop is left in the gourds.

(*Ozias waves him away, and he retires.*)

OZIAS (*to Haggith, who is busy with the sack*). Woman, has the lady Judith perchance dreamed a dream?

HAGGITH (*enigmatically*). My mistress has dreamed no dream. Why does the lord Ozias ask?

OZIAS. It seemed to me—(*stops*)

HAGGITH. Dreams lift up fools. (*Exit into the house.*) (*Exit Ozias, L.*)

(*The soldier strolls forward. Twilight begins to fall.*)

(*Enter Haggith from the house with more baggage.*)

HAGGITH (*to the soldier; curtly; not looking at him*). So thou hast no water?

FIRST SOLDIER (*with genial freedom*). Yea, Haggith, we have still a little.

HAGGITH. Then thou has lied to the governor?

FIRST SOLDIER. *Him?* (*With a jerk of the shoulder!*) *He* knows! In truth now, thinkest thou he would expect us soldiers to keep guard without water? *He* knows! But he is a great lord, and in seemliness he asks for a lie, and that which he asks is given to him—in seemliness.

HAGGITH. But the officer raving as thou hast said with thirst?

FIRST SOLDIER. Ah! It is the business of a worshipful officer to scorn deceit and to suffer.

HAGGITH. And all the people?

FIRST SOLDIER. The people are the people. But we soldiers are soldiers—and must drink, or we cannot guard. (*Yawns.*) Eh! I could lie down and snore for seven years, but I am appointed to watch all night.

HAGGITH (*suddenly caressing*). Sweet warrior! Would I could rest thee!

FIRST SOLDIER (*startled by the change in her demeanour*). Haggith! Thou art marvellously and desirably changed.

HAGGITH. I am practising to thy profit for that which lies before me and my mistress.

FIRST SOLDIER. What meanest thou?

HAGGITH. Chut! If thou hast heard a word, let it die with thee—it will not burst thee.

FIRST SOLDIER. Lord! turn away from me vain hopes and concupiscence.

HAGGITH. And so thou sleepest not this night!... Neither do I sleep.

FIRST SOLDIER. What?

HAGGITH. I go with my mistress upon a journey.

FIRST SOLDIER. What journey? There can be no journey for thee, unless thou leave the city and wend to the Assyrians.

HAGGITH (*curt again*). Nevertheless we go upon a journey.

FIRST SOLDIER. It is madness.

HAGGITH. It may be.

FIRST SOLDIER. Who can tell the heart of a master? Not I! When dost thou depart?

HAGGITH. My mistress is attiring.

FIRST SOLDIER. Thou dost not attire her?

HAGGITH. I! I, who have charge over all that is hers! Wilt thou tell me, then, what is the task of her tiring-women? Idle sluts!

FIRST SOLDIER. And this is thy baggage?

HAGGITH (*matter-of-fact*). A cruse of oil, a bag of parched corn, fine bread, three lumps of figs—and a bottle of wine—yea, the last!

FIRST SOLDIER (*drawing in his lips*). Ah! But thou wilt need an ass for this cargo.

HAGGITH (*drily*). I am the ass.

Enter Judith, magnificently dressed.

(The soldier retires, back.)

JUDITH. Is all prepared?

HAGGITH. All is prepared, mistress.

Enter Ozias, L.

OZIAS (*ecstatic at the sight of Judith's splendour*). O, loveliness! O, lily of the field! Who shall withstand you, and who shall say you nay?

JUDITH (*smiling*). I am ready to depart.

OZIAS. The secret way is opened. I will lead you to it.

JUDITH (*gently*). The secret way? I will take no secret way.

OZIAS. But hear me, lady. The peril from the archers far off—

JUDITH. What did I say to you, lord Ozias? I said: You shall stand this night in the gate of the city, and I will go forth. My desire is that you command the gatemen to open the gates, so that I and my waiting-woman may pass out before all men, and in the sight of the Lord. (*She bends to examine Haggith's baggage.*)

OZIAS (*moved. Calling to the soldiers*). Ho! Let the gates of the city be opened, that the lady Judith may go forth.

FIRST SOLDIER. Yea, lord. (*Calling to others, off.*) Gatemen!

(The gatemen man the gate-chains, and citizens rush in with cries: 'What shall happen to us? The lady Judith leaves the city? At night-fall? What is it?')

OZIAS (*fiercely, to the crowd*). Get hence! Dogs!

JUDITH (*softly*). Let them stay, Lord Ozias, for that which I do, I do not in secret, neither shall it be hidden.

OZIAS (*to the crowd*). Make a way clear to the gates.

JUDITH. Before I go, I will look into the valley whither I descend. (*She mounts to the vantage-point*).

VOICES. Water! Water! Or we die!

JUDITH (*from the vantage-point*). Brethren, bewail not! Remember what things the Lord did to Abraham, and how he tried Isaac, and what happened to Jacob in Mesopotamia. For the Lord has not tried us in the fire as he did them, neither has he taken vengeance upon us. But the Lord scourges them that come near to him, to admonish them. (*She kneels. Following her example, everybody kneels.*) O Lord God of my father Simeon, the Assyrians are multiplied in their power; they trust in shield, and spear, and bow, and sling; and know not that thou art the Lord which breakest battles; the Lord is thy name. Behold their pride, and send thy wrath upon their heads; give into my hand, which am a widow, the power that I have conceived. For thy power standeth not in multitude, nor thy might in strong men. Smite the Assyrians by the deceit of my lips; break down their stateliness by the hand of a woman. And make my speech and deceit to be their wound and stripe, who have purposed cruel things against thy covenant and against the top of Zion. And make every nation and tribe to acknowledge that thou art the God of all power, and that there is none other that protecteth the people of Israel but thou. (*She rises. The crowd murmurs: 'Amen.' All rise. Judith comes down from the vantage-point. Silence.*)

OZIAS (*moved*). Open the gates.

JUDITH (*to Haggith*). Nothing is forgotten?

HAGGITH. Nothing.

(*Judith moves a step towards the gates.*)

OZIAS. The soul of my soul goes with you into the valley.

JUDITH (*to Haggith, solemnly*). And the knife?

(*Haggith gives a gesture. At the same moment a woman comes from the house with a knife, which she hands to Haggith, who hands it to Judith, who takes it ceremoniously, and hides it in her dress. The gates are now opened, and the distant plain under the setting sun is seen covered with the tents of the Assyrian army.*)

(*Judith goes slowly through the gates, followed by Haggith carrying the baggage.*)

VOICES (*as Judith passes*). Water! Water!

OZIAS (*with deep emotion*). Close the gates. Light the watchfires.

(*The gates begin slowly to close. The glow of the watchfires is seen.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE I

The valley of Jezreel. The city of Bethulia on the hill in the distance.

Haggith with her baggage enters to Ingur and his men.

TIME: *The next morning but one.*

INGUR. What art thou?

HAGGITH (*prudishly and coldly*). If it please thee, I am a woman.

INGUR. No. Thou art a hedgehog.

HAGGITH (*suddenly cajoling*). I ask pardon. When I saw thy great handsomeness I grew afraid, and my tongue was stiffened. In my country there is no man so handsome as thou art.

INGUR. Ah! (*Much mollified.*) And what then is thy country?

HAGGITH. I am a woman of the Hebrews, and I have come from Bethulia.

INGUR (*astonished*). A woman of the Hebrews! From Bethulia! (*To his men*). Stand back from my face. (*The men retire. To Haggith.*) This is a rare strange tale.

HAGGITH. Could I lie to *thee*? I have escaped from the city, which is given over to be consumed. I sought water for my thirst, for in Bethulia there is no water, and the people faint in the streets.

INGUR. But it is a long journey from Bethulia, and thou art fresh and delicate as though just risen from thy bed.

HAGGITH (*smiling*). I can hide nothing from thee, mighty wolf. I am, indeed, but just risen from my bed. The night before last night I set forth secretly, and came into the valley yesterday at noon, and lay soft in a cave where three springs bubbled, and drank, and slept until this morning's sunrise.

INGUR. What is thy name?

HAGGITH. Haggith.

INGUR. Thy name is as strange as thy errand, and as thyself; and surely thou art a woman of the Hebrews, which is a race of lunatics, as I am told.

HAGGITH. I have figs fit for a great king. (*Opens her sack and offers some figs.*)

INGUR (*eating*). Um! And what else hast thou? Let me touch thee, Haggith. (*He touches her carefully*). Yes, thou art outlandish, and no doubt mad, but comely. Comely! Thou hast the likeness and feel of a woman. Always have I hankered after strange women, and now lo! one falls ripe into my mouth. (*Haggith shrinks. Reassuringly.*) In a way of speaking! In a way speaking! For thou art not in my mouth. And so thou earnest to slake thy thirst?

HAGGITH. Yes, my roaring lion.

INGUR. Listen! Thou hast saved thy life with water. But thou art lost.

HAGGITH. Lost?

INGUR. Ay! A woman in the camps of the Assyrians—she is undone. She is a lamb in a den of terrible tigers. (*Comfortingly.*) No, no! I will protect thee, but I warn thee that thou art undone. I am honest. (*Caresses her.*)

HAGGITH (*clumsily returning his caress*). Thou wilt not harm me.

INGUR. I will not tear thee to pieces, but thou shalt come away with me. (*She timidly strokes him*). Thou hast not the habit of this stroking.

HAGGITH. My mistress commanded me, when I encountered any noble Assyrian, to use him thus. It is true that I have not the habit. Nevertheless I do what I can.

INGUR (*startled at the mention of a mistress*). Thy—thy mistress? Ye are two? Where then is thy mistress? Tell me upon the instant—is she fairer than thou?

HAGGITH. Seven times more fair.

INGUR. Fetch her!

HAGGITH. My mistress is washing herself in a fountain of water by the cave. She sent me forward in peace and friendliness to announce her coming.

INGUR. Fetch her! (*Suddenly perceiving Bagoas in the distance, he changes his manner.*) Stay! Bagoas is approaching, and he may have seen thee. His eyes are sharp. Stand off. (*Haggith moves away a little.*) But when I tell thee, fall down on thy face.

HAGGITH. Is he a great captain?

INGUR. His mightiness is the chief eunuch of the Prince, and there is none greater than he save only the Prince himself, for Bagoas has charge over all the women of the Prince's tents.

HAGGITH. Women of the Prince's tents?

INGUR. Ay! Wives! Concubines! Virgins! Beyond counting. Didst thou think in thy Hebrew pride, that the Prince was a savage and a barbarian?... Down, damsel! Here is Bagoas. Embrace the earth for thy life's sake. (*Haggith obeys.*)

Enter Bagoas, with attendants, L.

(*Ingur salutes him with extreme deference.*)

BAGOAS. Who art thou?

INGUR. Ingur, mightiness, commanding twenty footmen.

BAGOAS. Begone from my sight. This morning the Prince condescends to walk through the camp, that all the armies may take joy in his countenance. It is not meet that he should be seen of any lower than a lieutenant.

INGUR (*indicating Haggith*). Mightiness, a woman of the Hebrews escaped from Bethulia to find water! And by my subtlety I have captured her.

BAGOAS. A woman of the Hebrews! (*Surveying Haggith.*) Rise, scum, and let me behold thy deformity. (*Haggith obeys.*)

INGUR. And there is another yet to appear,—her mistress, seven times fairer.

BAGOAS. Her mistress may be seven times fairer than this eyesore, and yet ugly. (*To Haggith.*) Who is thy mistress?

HAGGITH. The lady Judith.

BAGOAS. Judith! A name fit only for a cat! Why is she here? How is she here? What is her secret and detestable purpose? For there is a trick in this thing.

HAGGITH. I know not my mistress's purpose.

BAGOAS. Tell me thy mistress's purpose, or I will have thee smothered.

HAGGITH. I know only that if Holofernes—

BAGOAS (*stopping her angrily*). Callest thou the illustrious one by his name? The most high *Prince* Holofernes, foul wench.

HAGGITH. The most high Prince Holofernes—if he so wills my mistress would speak with his highness.

BAGOAS (*laughing heartily*). Speak with the Prince? *Speak* with the Prince? Ha-ha! (*All the men laugh.*) What is the state of thy mistress?

HAGGITH. The lady Judith is a widow.

BAGOAS (*still more amused*). Aha! A widow! And the Hebrew hag would *speak* with Prince Holofernes! (*The men laugh and jeer.*)

Enter Judith, *R.*

(*Haggith goes quickly to her. All the men stare at Judith, deeply impressed.*)

HAGGITH (*aside to Judith*). There are many hussies in the camps, thousands and thousands, mistress. This lord is the chief eunuch.

BAGOAS (*aside to an attendant*). If this be an example of the Bethulian women, I shall have a momentous business upon me when their city falls.

FIRST ATTENDANT. Yea, mightiness.

(*Judith, signing to Haggith to stand aside, bows to the ground before Bagoas; then rises again.*)

BAGOAS (*after a short pause*). You are very beautiful.

JUDITH. There are beautiful women in Judea, but no man of Judea would look twice at such as I, a shrunken widow, like dried fish.

(*Exit* Ingur, *excitedly, L.*)

BAGOAS. I have heard how you have escaped out of Bethulia and come hither in order to find water. (*Blandly.*) Aught else?

JUDITH. My desire also was to have speech privately with the great conqueror, Holofernes.

BAGOAS. Ah! We are well met, you and I. For I am Bagoas, chief eunuch to the illustrious Prince. (*Aside to second attendant.*) Run. Fetch the box of veils. (*Exit second attendant, L.*)

JUDITH (*saluting once more*). I supplicate then, mighty Bagoas, that you lead me quickly to the illustrious Prince Holofernes.

BAGOAS. Surely! Surely! It is my pleasure to content you. (*Aside, to attendant, anxiously.*) This dried fish by her damnable beauty will reach great power, and if I speak not softly to her now she will undo me in that day.

FIRST ATTENDANT. Yea, mightiness.

JUDITH. I humbly thank your mightiness.

BAGOAS. But it is necessary that you should relate to me your little affair. For no woman speaks to the illustrious Prince until she has spoken to me.

JUDITH. It cannot be so.

BAGOAS (*persuasively*). In my ear, privily. Approach.

JUDITH. It cannot be so.

BAGOAS. What mean you—it cannot be so?

JUDITH. I will utter my errand to the illustrious Prince Holofernes alone.

BAGOAS (*losing his self-control; angrily*). What? Thou queasy chit! Thou minx! Thou jade! Baggage! Mopsy! Shameless wench! Thou wilt not obey Bagoas, chief eunuch in the camps of the Assyrians! I will make thee the slave of my slave and the plaything of scullions. (*Stops. Judith smiles. Haggith subsides alarmed at her feet.*) Thou shalt be abandoned to the sutlers and the ass-drivers, and thus thou shalt learn who is Bagoas and what is his power! (*Stops again. Judith still smiles.*) The strumpets of the kitchens shall scorn thee! I—I—

JUDITH (*smiling sweetly*). Mightiness! Mightiness! I am your bondwoman, but it is appointed by heaven that I shall speak with the illustrious Prince Holofernes himself.

BAGOAS (*controlling himself, smiling*). Well, if it is appointed by heaven, so shall it be. Forget my words. They had no evil intent, for I was trying you, as my duty is. (*Aside to attendant.*) The sweetness of her glance dissolves my backbone.

FIRST ATTENDANT. Yea, mightiness.

BAGOAS (*to Judith*). Follow me, lady. (*Aside to attendant.*) Thinkest thou the Prince will come this way? (*Pointing.*)

FIRST ATTENDANT. Yea, mightiness.

BAGOAS. Or that?

FIRST ATTENDANT. Yea, mightiness.

BAGOAS. If the Prince so much as sees her before the city is taken, never will the city be taken, and we shall all be her captives.

FIRST ATTENDANT. Yea, mightiness.

BAGOAS (*beating the attendant*). I will lead her by the path to the cave, for the Prince will surely not come that way. (*To Judith.*) Follow me, lady.

(*Bagoas moves R. Judith hesitates a moment as Haggith picks up her sack. Enter R. the heralds of Holofernes, followed by Holofernes.*)

BAGOAS (*to himself*). Holofernes! (*To his attendants.*) Hide her, rascals, or Assyria is undone. (*The attendants range themselves between Judith and Holofernes.*)

(*Bagoas receives Holofernes with a prostration and high ceremony.*)

HOLOFERNES. Where is this woman?

BAGOAS. Woman, Prince?

HOLOFERNES (*impatient*). This Hebrew woman, I say! One Ingur has run among the tents chattering, and the rumour of her has spread through the camps like a plague. By Nebuchadnezzar the one god, where is she, for it has been told to me that her beauty excels the beauty of all the women of the East and ravishes the eye exceedingly?

BAGOAS. Ah! It is of Judith that the Prince deigns to speak. Lo! I had caught her and was bringing her to your highness. (*To attendants.*) Stand aside, dogs.

(*Judith is revealed to Holofernes. She prostrates herself and then rises. Holofernes gazes at her, entranced.*)

HOLOFERNES. So thou hast escaped out of Bethulia to find water for thy thirst?

JUDITH. To find water, and to have speech with the most illustrious Prince.

HOLOFERNES. Woman (*approaching her a step, and then standing still*), be of good comfort, and fear not in thy heart, for I never hurt any that was willing to serve Nebuchadnezzar, the god of all the earth. And if thy people that dwell in the mountains had not held me lightly, I would not have lifted up my spear against them, but they have done these things to themselves.

BAGOAS (*aside, to Holofernes*). Terrible master, she is full of guile and deceitfulness, and came not at all for water, but for a hidden purpose against you. Therefore enquire of her closely.

HOLOFERNES (*to Bagoas*). Chastise thy tongue, ere it overthrow thee, fiend. There is no guile in that face. (*To Judith.*) Tell me now thy message and wherefore in truth thou art come. And tremble not, for thou shalt live this night.

JUDITH. Great prince, receive the words of your servant and suffer your handmaid to speak in your presence, and I will declare no lie to my lord.

HOLOFERNES. Speak.

JUDITH. I will speak to my lord alone.

BAGOAS (*aside to Holofernes*). It is a device against my lord.

HOLOFERNES (*to Judith*). Speak now, I command thee.

JUDITH. My message concerns the fate of Bethulia, and of all the Assyrians, and of my lord. Life and death are in it, for I have communed with heaven.

HOLOFERNES. Which heaven? Thine or mine?

JUDITH. There is but one God.

HOLOFERNES (*roughly*). And he is Nebuchadnezzar. Speak thy tale.

JUDITH. I will speak to my lord alone.

BAGOAS (*aside to Holofernes*). It is a device.

HOLOFERNES (*angrily*). Speak out all thy heart, and quickly!

JUDITH. I will speak to my lord in my lord's tent.

HOLOFERNES (*furious*). In my tent! Who art thou who defiest me, and what is thy licence, heathen slave, to defile the tent of Holofernes? Bind her. Take her away, and twist the cords about her neck, and strangle her, and cast her insolence into the lake.

(*Judith is seized and bound in an instant.*)

HOLOFERNES (*in two minds*). Wait!

BAGOAS. She is bound, illustrious prince.

HOLOFERNES. Wait!

BAGOAS (*aside to Holofernes*). Prince, let not the benevolence of your heart be your undoing, for in the loveliness of her face is cunning and great peril. I have lived all my days amid the craftiness of women, and my lord also knows somewhat of their strange tricks, which bring ruin to the carnal.

HOLOFERNES (*reflective*). Who would despise these Hebrews that have among them such women as she? (*Fiercely*). Surely it is not good that one man among them should be left; for if one were let go he might deceive the whole earth.

JUDITH (*advancing a step, appealingly*). Will the wise man cast away a pearl, and will my lord in anger lose his servant for ever?

BAGOAS (*to Holofernes*). Let her not speak with my lord alone in my lord's tent.

JUDITH. I would speak with the illustrious prince—and with Bagoas also. (*She smiles.*)

HOLOFERNES (*with a gesture*). I cannot lose thee. (*To attendants.*) Unbind her.

BAGOAS (*aside*). May heaven be with us, for the woman is against us!

HOLOFERNES (*to Bagoas*). Veil her, that her face and form be not seen as she passes to my tent, for she is mine.

BAGOAS (*calling*). The veils! The veils! Where is the rascal?

The attendant rushes in panting with the box of veils. He is followed by Ingur.

(*Judith is elaborately veiled in a series of veils by Bagoas and his attendants.*)

HOLOFERNES. Let her follow me.

(*Exeunt, R, with great ceremony, Holofernes and his heralds, followed by Judith.*)

INGUR (*as they go, stopping Bagoas, who goes last*). Mightiness, pardon your slave.

BAGOAS. Well?

INGUR (*pointing to Haggith*). Your slave captured the mistress. Reward him with this outlandish wench.

BAGOAS (*carelessly*). The fool goeth out to seek his own damnation. Take her.

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

Interior of the tent of Holofernes. A couch with curtains, L. The principal entrance to the tent is at the back. Secondary entrances in the hangings, L. and R.

TIME: *The same morning, later.*

Bagoas and his attendant are unveiling Judith.

BAGOAS. Animal, wouldst thou dare to behold that which is thy lord's? Leave the last veil, and away with thee.

FIRST ATTENDANT. Yea, mightiness!

(*Exit back with the veils already removed from Judith.*)

BAGOAS. Queen of the night of Holofernes!

JUDITH (*through the veil*). Mighty Bagoas!

BAGOAS. The Prince comes to look upon you in his tent.

JUDITH. Mighty Bagoas, deign to answer a question I will put.

BAGOAS. Deign to ask, lady, and my humility shall answer; for your beauty has blinded Holofernes this day and he is your captive, and his servant is your servant, and there is no law in

the camps of the Assyrians save your glance. (*He makes a covert gesture of half-amused resentful resignation.*)

JUDITH. Nebuchadnezzar is your god? Is it not so, Bagoas?

BAGOAS. Nebuchadnezzar is henceforward the god of the Assyrians and of all the lands which their spears conquer. It is an official order.

JUDITH. If Nebuchadnezzar laid a command upon you, would you disregard it?

BAGOAS. I would not, for my skin is very valuable to me.

JUDITH. As Nebuchadnezzar is your god, so is the Lord of Israel mine. And my God laid a secret command upon me to speak with Prince Holofernes alone and with none other in his tent. Thus, and thus only, was it that I refused to speak in the presence even of the mighty Bagoas. But as I withstood you in the valley there, the God of Israel descended upon me and I heard the voice of God in my ear, and the voice said: 'It is permitted to thee to speak with Bagoas also.' Therefore I yielded to the importunity of Prince Holofernes and of Bagoas.

BAGOAS. Your god is a wise god and has discernment.

JUDITH. This I tell you, that there may be peace and good intelligence between us. Is there peace between us?

BAGOAS. Lady, in my heat I admonished you with hard words and much vituperation.

JUDITH (*innocently*). By Nebuchadnezzar, I heard none.

BAGOAS. There is peace between us. And in the closeness of our intelligence you and I will rule them that rule all Assyria.

Enter Holofernes, L.

(*Bagoas prostrates himself. Holofernes walks about, ignoring Judith.*)

HOLOFERNES (*to Bagoas*). At what hour is the Council of Captains?

BAGOAS. The Council awaits your highness.

(*Suddenly Holofernes snatches the veil from Judith, and throws it on the floor. He gazes at her. Judith prostrates herself. Holofernes drops on to the couch, and looks at everything except Judith.*)

HOLOFERNES (*imperiously*). Rise. (*Judith rises. A pause. Holofernes plays with a jewel on his costume. Without looking at Judith.*) And Achior?

JUDITH. Illustrious Prince.

HOLOFERNES. Did the slave reach Bethulia?

JUDITH. The men of Bethulia took him, and he declared to them all that he had spoken to my lord Prince. And many approved him.

HOLOFERNES. And what sayest *thou* of Achior?

JUDITH. O lord and governor, I say: Reject not the word of Achior, but lay it up in your heart.

HOLOFERNES. Thou art bold.

JUDITH. The word of Achior is true. For the Israelites shall not be punished, and the sword shall not prevail against them, except they sin against their God.

HOLOFERNES. Not even *my* sword?

JUDITH. Not even the sword of my lord and governor, except they sin against their God. (*With significance.*) But they will sin.

HOLOFERNES. Ah! They will sin? In what will they sin?

JUDITH. Death is fallen upon them, and they will provoke their God to anger, for their water is scant, and they faint in their thirst; and they will drink the holy wine which was sanctified and reserved for the priests who serve before the face of our God: which thing is not lawful for any of the people so much as to touch with their hands.

HOLOFERNES. What has all this to do with me? There is no god but Nebuchadnezzar.

JUDITH. It touches my lord and governor, because, knowing all this, I am fled from Bethulia, which shall be accurst; and the God of Israel has sent me to work things with my lord and governor whereat the whole earth shall be astonished.

HOLOFERNES (*looking at her, interested*). What things? And what have I to do with thy god? I need not thy god, for after the Israelites have drunk their wine they will thirst again; and when the city is broken with fainting, it will fall safe into my hands while I sit and watch.

JUDITH (*with fire*). And when the city has fallen while the Assyrians sit and watch, and when all men whisper one to another that the greatest captain of the earth conquered by a device because

he dared not attack boldly with spear, and bow, and sling—in that day will my lord and governor be content? Or will he be ashamed, and blush to lift up his eyes?

HOLOFERNES (*disturbed*). It is a true word.

BAGOAS. It is a true word.

HOLOFERNES (*savagely*). This day will I attack the city and take it, and though I make fifty thousand widows and orphans in Assyria I will compass Bethulia, and not one house in it shall be left standing, nor one Israelite alive.

JUDITH (*shaking her head slowly*). Why is my lord against the pleasure of the Most High? Do I not say, and has it not been revealed to me, that Bethulia shall not perish until its inhabitants have sinned before God? Listen, illustrious Prince, I will remain this night. And when the time comes I will go into the valley, and I will pray to God, and mayhap He will tell me when the Israelites in Bethulia have committed their sin. And I will come and show it to you, and thereupon my lord and governor shall go forth with all his army, and none shall resist him.

HOLOFERNES (*fascinated*). Thou wilt come to me when the time is at hand for my triumph!

JUDITH. And hearken further! I will lead my lord and governor in the midst of Judea, until he comes to Jerusalem; and I will set his throne in the midst of Jerusalem, and a dog shall not so much as open his mouth at my lord and prince. For these things were declared unto me from on high, and I am sent to tell them.

HOLOFERNES (*aside to Bagoas, excitedly*). There is not such a woman from one end of the earth to the other, both for beauty of face and wisdom of words.

BAGOAS. It may well be so, Prince. But I have not seen the whole earth.

HOLOFERNES (*to Judith*). Thou hast done well to come to me, that strength may be in my hands and destruction upon them that lightly regard Nebuchadnezzar, the one god. Thou art ravishing in countenance, and if thou do as thou hast spoken, thou shalt dwell in my house which is over against the house of King Nebuchadnezzar, and thou shalt be renowned through the east and through the west. Bagoas, prepare meat and wine for her.

BAGOAS (*making as if to give an order*). To hear is to obey.

JUDITH. I will not eat of my lord's meat, nor drink of his wine, lest there be offence; I have brought provision by my waiting-woman.

BAGOAS. But if thy provision fail?

JUDITH (*significantly*). My provision will not fail before the Lord works by my hand the things which He has determined.

Bagoas *claps his hands. Enter an attendant.*

BAGOAS. Fetch Haggith, the waiting-woman of the lady Judith! Quickly! (*Exit attendant. To Holofernes.*) Prince, shall the Hebrew woman eat and drink of her provision in my lord's tent?

HOLOFERNES. She shall eat and drink in my tent, and she shall not leave it.

BAGOAS. Then it is right that my lord remains not. And moreover the Council humbly waits for my lord. (*Exit Holofernes, L.*)

BAGOAS (*to Judith, as he follows Holofernes*). Did I not say that you and I shall rule them that rule Assyria? (*Exit L.*)

Enter Haggith, back, with provisions.

HAGGITH (*excited, looking round to see if they are alone*). Mistress! Is it possible?

JUDITH. What has taken thee?

HAGGITH. Is this the tent of the monster?

JUDITH. Hush!

HAGGITH (*whispering*). It is greater and more magnificent than the temple at Bethulia. (*Looking into a corner.*) But unclean. Have they no besoms?... Ah! (*Looking up at the roof.*) The bigness of it makes me small like a child before it can walk. I could not live comfortably in such a great windy place. No! I prefer our own house to all this royalty.

JUDITH. Give me food, Haggith. Where hast thou been? (*She sits.*)

HAGGITH. Mistress, I have been with the man Ingur! (*Arranging Judith's costume, and then setting out the food and wine.*) In obedience to your command. At Bethulia, being busied all my days with the ordering of your possessions, I had no time for traffic with men; neither desire. And I deemed them terrible and masterful creatures. And when you commanded me to go forth into the camps and delude and entangle with wiles whatever Assyrian I should meet, I was afraid. For it was in my heart that I could not accomplish this thing. Yet I have done it prettily. And it is easier to me far than sweeping with a besom. Either all men are simpletons and besotted with self-conceit, or Ingur exceeds greatly in folly. I have been given to him for his slave, but he is

mine and knows it not. (*She sits.*)

JUDITH. Where hast thou left him?

HAGGITH. Mistress I would not suffer that you should pass from my sight, and I followed you, and Ingur followed me gladly, and at last the guard seized him for that he was found within the precincts of the prince's quarter, which is forbidden to his rank, and many stripes will be his. Mistress, you eat not.

JUDITH (*trying to eat*). Yes, I eat. Do thou eat for me.

HAGGITH. I have eaten and drunk—with Ingur.

JUDITH. But not of his provision?

HAGGITH (*nodding*). He so softly entreated me.

JUDITH. It is a sin and an offence for thee, being an Israelite.

HAGGITH. For such as my high-born mistress, it is an offence. But for the handmaid—pooh! She eats as she can, and the Lord turneth away his glance until she has finished her platter. Moreover, did you not lay it upon me to beguile the dolt? And verily, mistress, I have rejoiced much this day; and Ingur—

JUDITH. Silence with thy prattle. Bethink thee of the dread business upon which I am come down from Bethulia into the valley?

HAGGITH (*subdued; offering food*). Eat, mistress.

JUDITH. I cannot. My soul rejects it, and my body is on fire with expectation and suspense. (*Rising. Haggith also rises.*) Stay thou where thou art, for I will go forth alone. I must commune with the God of Israel for my tranquillity, and I dare not seek him in the tent of the heathen. (*Exit, back.*)

(*Haggith gathers the meat together.*)

Enter Holofernes and Bagoas, L.

HOLOFERNES (*looking about the tent, alarmed*). Where is she? Has she fled? If she has escaped me, this shall be thy last day, Bagoas. What is this girl here?

BAGOAS. Prince, has any woman yet slipped through these hands? This girl is the waiting wench of the lady Judith. (*To Haggith.*) Where is thy mistress, wench?

HAGGITH (*frightened and foolish*). My mistress having eaten ... having eaten naught, is gone to—to—pray.

BAGOAS. Bring her. Her god may wait, but not the illustrious Prince. Run with both thy legs.

HAGGITH. Ye—es, mightiness. (*Exit, back*)

HOLOFERNES. Bagoas, with thine arts thou shalt persuade the Hebrew woman to come to us and to eat and drink with us this night.

BAGOAS (*grimly*). Persuasion shall be used, highness. My arts are many and various.

HOLOFERNES. It will be a shame for our person if we let such a woman go, not having delighted in her company. If we do not draw her to us she will laugh us to scorn.

BAGOAS. Yea, highness. But my lord has but this moment appointed a great feast with his captains at sunset. How then shall he eat and drink with the lady Judith?

HOLOFERNES. Thick-skull! Speak not to me of my captains! The Council of the Captains was as dust in my mouth, and I could not away with it. Therefore I sharply dismissed the Council, and soothed their damnable pride with the promise of a mighty feast. But what care I for the captains? My heart thirsts horribly for this Hebrew woman, and I am full of a great madness.

BAGOAS. So be it, highness. Nevertheless, the Prince has promised to his captains a mighty feast, and the word of Holofernes is a rock that cannot be shaken.

HOLOFERNES. Oh! What a calamity is love! And there is no slave so trodden down as him that is the slave of desire.... Bah! I will eat and drink quickly with the captains, and the woman shall await me here.

Enter Judith, back. On seeing Holofernes she prostrates herself.

HOLOFERNES. Arise, sorceress. (*Judith rises. To Bagoas.*) Go fetch leopard skins for her repose.

BAGOAS. I will send for the skins on the instant, highness.

HOLOFERNES. Thou wilt go thyself to fetch them, elephant. And come not back without the finest skins in my wardrobe. See to it.

(*Exit Bagoas, back.*)

HOLOFERNES. Come closer. (*Judith obeys.*) Look into my eyes. (*Judith obeys.*) Sorceress, thou

knowest thy power.

JUDITH. I have no power, save that which is given to me from on high.

HOLOFERNES. Thou wast praying to thy god?

JUDITH. Yea, highness.

HOLOFERNES. Didst thou demand of him that he should tell thee if the Israelites in Bethulia had committed their sin, and if the time of my triumph was at hand?

JUDITH. No, lord. I prayed for the forgiveness of the transgressions of thy handmaid.

HOLOFERNES. Why didst thou not demand of him what I ask thee?

JUDITH. Who am I to hasten the God of Israel? In the night time, and in the darkness, when all men sleep,—then it is that my God condescends towards me, and my ear hears his secret purposes.

HOLOFERNES (*low*). This night?

JUDITH. Who can search out heaven?

HOLOFERNES. This night?

JUDITH. It may be.

HOLOFERNES. And thou wilt come to me in the night and tell me thy message?

JUDITH. I will come to thee in the night, great prince.

HOLOFERNES. And thou wilt eat and drink with me in my triumph?

JUDITH (*after a pause*). If it pleases my lord.

HOLOFERNES. Thou wilt eat of my meat and drink of my wine, which I will give thee?

JUDITH (*after a pause*). If my lord is alone and there is none with him. For it is not right that any should see me.

HOLOFERNES. I will be alone. But Bagoas shall stand at the door of the tent.

JUDITH. As my lord wills.

HOLOFERNES (*ecstatic, moving a little towards her; she responds*). Fairest among women! Can it be!... The way of God is wondrous.

(*A half-veiled Assyrian woman appears through the hangings R., and watches.*)

JUDITH (*solemnly and significantly*). There are yet hid greater things than this, and thou hast yet seen but a few of his works.

HOLOFERNES (*sinking back on the couch, mysteriously afraid*). Sorceress!

(*The watcher disappears.*)

JUDITH (*cooingly*). Does my lord shrink from his handmaid?

(*Holofernes stretches his hands to her.*)

CURTAIN.

SCENE III

SCENE: *The same.*

TIME: *The same night.*

Wine and food are set by the couch.

A lamp is burning.

BAGOAS (*at back entrance to tent, calling to people off*). To your beds, all of you. Let none remain. (*He stands a moment at the entrance; a few distant shouts are heard; then silence. Bagoas comes within the tent towards the couch. To Holofernes.*) The waiters are gone, Prince. There is no one left to disturb the night.

HOLOFERNES. Hast thou seen her?

BAGOAS (*after a pause*). No, prince.

HOLOFERNES. But didst thou look?

BAGOAS. I looked, O illustrious.

HOLOFERNES. Is there moonlight?

BAGOAS. The moon is clouded, highness.

HOLOFERNES. Give me wine. (Bagoas *obeys*.) Bagoas!

BAGOAS. Prince?

(*The hangings of the tent R., balloon inwards a little.*)

HOLOFERNES (*looking behind him sharply, spilling some wine*). The wind is rising.

BAGOAS. It is but a night breeze.

HOLOFERNES (*as he drinks gloomily*). Bagoas, she has escaped back to her own people.

BAGOAS (*aside*). I would she had, the jade! (*To Holofernes*.) Prince, she cannot escape. Every path from the valley is guarded.

HOLOFERNES. What guard could restrain such a woman?

BAGOAS. Ah! Prince! What guard could restrain her?

HOLOFERNES. Dost thou echo me?

BAGOAS. I humbly think the thought of his highness.

HOLOFERNES. Do thy thinking outside.

(*Bagoas bows and moves towards the entrance. Judith is standing there. The two look at each other for a moment.*)

BAGOAS (*with a gesture, indicating Judith*). Highness!

HOLOFERNES (*Jumping up. To Bagoas*). Begone to thy post!

(*Judith glides in silently. Bagoas goes out. They pass by each other without a word or a salutation, but mutually scrutinizing.*)

JUDITH. The great feast of the captains is over?

HOLOFERNES. The captains are departed, drunken with wine and their pride. But thy feast and my feast is not begun. (*Points to the repast.*)

JUDITH (*enigmatically*). I am here.

HOLOFERNES (*ecstatic*). Art thou in truth here, or do my eyes behold that which is not?

JUDITH. Did I not say that I should come in the night?

HOLOFERNES. Yea, I trusted thee. I trusted thee so much that at the feast of the captains I commanded that all my hosts shall attack Bethulia, with bow, and sling, and spear, at sunrise, and also I gave the word of Holofernes for a pledge that naught in the heavens or on the earth should resist the onset of the Assyrians; for some among them feared the word of Achior which they had heard.

JUDITH. You have not done this thing?

HOLOFERNES. I have done it.

JUDITH. Would you forestall God, and would you speak the decrees of God before they are uttered?

HOLOFERNES. Thou saidst thou wouldst pray to thy god this night and that he would tell thee when the Israelites in Bethulia had committed their sin, and that thou wouldst come to me to proclaim the hour of my triumph.

JUDITH. I said: I will pray to God and *mayhap* he will tell me.

HOLOFERNES. Thou hast prayed, and thy god hath not answered?

JUDITH. He has not answered.

HOLOFERNES (*with bravado*). He is no god, then, thy god. Let us drink.

JUDITH (*as Holofernes moves towards her, solemnly*). Touch not your handmaid, and touch not the goblet. (*She goes to the skins, R.*)

HOLOFERNES (*following Judith gently*). Thou art offended.

JUDITH. Stand afar off, Holofernes, and meddle not with her that communes with the Most High.

(*Judith kneels. Holofernes goes in the direction of the couch. Silence. Bagoas has been seen once or twice in the porch of the tent, his back turned. He has now gone again. Two half-veiled Assyrian women appear through the hangings, R., and watch a moment, then vanish. Judith slowly rises.*)

HOLOFERNES. What has befallen thee?

JUDITH. It has befallen me that this moment the God of Israel has spoken and my ear has heard his command. (*Approaching Holofernes.*)

HOLOFERNES. What saith thy god?

JUDITH. My ear has heard that the Israelites in Bethulia have committed their sin, and at sunrise the Assyrians shall assault Bethulia and none shall withstand them.

HOLOFERNES. A miracle!

JUDITH. A miracle in thy tent, O great warrior!

HOLOFERNES. To-morrow is appointed to be the day of my triumph.

JUDITH (*moved*). Yea, it is so.

HOLOFERNES (*gratefully*). Hear me, Judith. Thy god shall be my god.

JUDITH. In truth thou art set apart to be his. HOLOFERNES (*close to her*). Thy body trembles.

JUDITH (*smiling*). Thinkst thou then that I was not afraid for thee? But my fear is gone from me, for now I know thy fate and the decree of heaven concerning thee.

HOLOFERNES (*aside*). To-morrow is appointed for my triumph, but this night also shall I exult. (*To Judith.*) Let us eat and drink together, for we are alone in the night, and thou hast promised.

JUDITH (*gaily*). Let us feast.

HOLOFERNES (*animated by her responsive tone*). Take off thy tunic; thou art in thy own house. Let Holofernes be thy tire-woman. (*Approaching her.*)

JUDITH. No! (*Moving from him to the further side of the couch.*) But he shall be my slave to serve me. Pour out the wine, great slave.

(*While Holofernes cheerfully obeys, Judith takes the knife from her garments and places it behind the couch. Then, as he stands with the wine, gazing at her and separated from her only by the couch, she slowly removes her tunic and appears in indoor attire. She comes towards him and takes the wine from him and drinks.*)

HOLOFERNES. I feared that in the strictness of thy Hebrew scruples thou wouldst not drink of my wine.

JUDITH. I will drink again. (*She does so.*)

HOLOFERNES (*taking the goblet and drinking*). Dost thou verily know thy power and thy dominion, Judith?

JUDITH (*simply*). Yes, I know it now better than thou.

HOLOFERNES. Thou dost not. For I am mad for thee, and thou hast set thy seal upon me for evermore. My heart cannot hold thee, for thou hast filled it to overflowing, and all men see that my heart is full of thee and runneth over. Yea, I have a hundred and two and thirty thousand that bow themselves at my feet and that live and die by my glance. And I am at *thy* feet and thy glance is my joy and my sorrow according to thy whim. Judith, I entreat thee, command me something. For whatever thou command me, that will I execute. And be not afraid in thy command, for my power is very great and there is none like it save only my lord Nebuchadnezzar's.

JUDITH (*tenderly*). I command thee that thou be happy. For thy captive has no other desire.

HOLOFERNES. Say not my captive. For it is I that am thy prisoner. And I will set thee on my throne, and in my great boldness I will dare to sit beside thee. But thou shalt reign. And we will live together in Assyria long years.

JUDITH (*changing her mood*). There is no requisition in the grave whether you have lived ten or an hundred or a thousand years. But the God of Israel is a shield.

HOLOFERNES (*eagerly*). And I have told thee that thy god shall be my god; but in secret, because of that which I owe to King Nebuchadnezzar. Yet shall the whole earth know that thou, Judith, alone art my god.

JUDITH. But thou hast other wives.

HOLOFERNES. No!

JUDITH. Yes! It has been whispered to me that thou hast many wives, and concubines without number.

HOLOFERNES. It is a lie. For from this night I have put away from me all women but thee, and there is not one among them to compare with thee. (*Appealingly*). And since the judgment of heaven hath done a miracle by thee in the tent of Holofernes this night, wilt thou deny, O tenderness! that thou hast been divinely appointed to me, and I to thee?

JUDITH. I will not deny that the Lord is in this thing. And for thy comfort I will tell thee that which thou knowest not.

HOLOFERNES (*expectant*). Tell me.

JUDITH. Before I escaped from Bethulia, as I lay on my bed, a vision came to me, and it was the vision of Holofernes in the likeness of his majesty and his might. And I saw the vision by my bed, and so it was that I came down into the valley.... (*Softly.*) And wouldst thou that I should have uttered this secret to any but thee!

HOLOFERNES (*full of emotion*). I will kiss thy lips, and thou art mine, O fragrance!

JUDITH. Kiss my lips.

(Holofernes kisses her, and then in an excess of feeling stumbles backward.)

(A half-veiled Assyrian woman appears at the opening R., and watches. Bagoas, in the porch of the tent, turns and sees her, and dashes at her with a weapon. Both disappear through the opening, R.)

JUDITH (*moving with stealth towards the hidden knife, comfortingly*). O mighty child, where is thy strength, and where is thy terribleness? Rest thee a moment on the couch, and thy soul's captive will tend thee.

(Holofernes drops on the couch, and Judith caresses him.)

HOLOFERNES (*murmuring*). My great joy has overthrown me.

(Judith, seizing the knife and leaning over Holofernes, kills him while she is still caressing.)

JUDITH (*as she uses the knife; murmuring*). Thou that wouldst go against the pleasure of the Most High! Thou that wouldst defile Judea! Thou that hast dishonoured with thy kiss the widow of Manasses! Thou that hast compelled me to guile and deceit and much lying so that I might perform the will of God! The grave shall be thy house!

Enter Haggith, L.

JUDITH (*turning to Haggith, firmly and impressively*). I have done that which I had to do, and the power of Assyria is fallen. (*Pointing.*) Take the head by the beard, and put it in thy sack, and let us depart.

CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE I

SCENE: *Same as Act I.*

TIME: *A few hours later than Act II, Scene III, the same night. The sole light is that of torches, and watchfires (off).*

The gatemen are at the gates.

There is a knocking on the outside of the gates.

Enter First Soldier, running.

FIRST SOLDIER (*to a gateman, who is climbing up in order to look over the top of the gates*). Look not over, booby. Thy fool's face might meet the point of an Assyrian spear. (*The gateman slips down quickly.*)

(*Renewed knocking.*)

FIRST SOLDIER (*shouting*). None can enter the city till sunrise. And not then if I like not the aspect of his phiz.

HAGGITH (*off*). It is Haggith, servant of the lady Judith. Open the gates quickly, for I am become a woman of much consequence.

FIRST SOLDIER. Haggith? It is the voice of Haggith; yet it may also be devils. (*To another soldier who has entered.*) Run! Rouse the lord Ozias. (*Exit soldier.*)

HAGGITH. I have water with me. Many gourds! Fresh water! Cool water!

(*The gatemen begin to work the gate-chains.*)

FIRST SOLDIER. What do ye, dogs? Stop, and await the order of the lord Ozias.

GATEMEN (*continuing to work the chains*). Water! Water!

FIRST SOLDIER. Pull, then, dogs. If there is water and it is wet I will taste it. But if there is not water, I will slay the first soul that enters. (*As the gates begin to open a little.*) Hold! No wider!

Enter Haggith with two gourds.

(*The gourds are snatched from her, and the men, including the First Soldier, drink.*)

FIRST SOLDIER (*as he drinks*). Yea, it is indeed Haggith. Where is thy mistress, and whence comest thou, my beloved water-carrier, for thou art my beloved? (Haggith *slaps his face.*)

Enter Ozias, L.

OZIAS (*furious*). Why are the gates opened? What is this?

FIRST SOLDIER. Haggith, lord, with water that is stronger than wine. (*Handing a gourd to Ozias to soothe him.*)

OZIAS. Where is thy mistress, wench? (*Drinks.*)

HAGGITH (*stiffly*). I am the forerunner of my mistress, who has sent me, and before many hours are passed the lady Judith will come also. (*She goes to the gates and beckons.*)

OZIAS. What art thou doing?

Enter Ingur, bearing a sack.

VOICES. An Assyrian! An Assyrian! (*Men spring at Ingur.*)

HAGGITH. Let him alone; he is my bondman and I have tamed him.

OZIAS. Shut the gates, for I will enquire into this matter.

HAGGITH. There are yet ten other Assyrians outside the gates, carrying gourds for me.

OZIAS. Ten other Assyrians! It is a trick!

HAGGITH (*proudly*). By my command they are chained by their necks, neck to neck. Fetch in the gourds, men, and give the people to drink.

(*The gourds are brought in amid cries and excitement. They are taken off, L.*)

OZIAS. Shut the gates, I say.

FIRST SOLDIER. And the ten Assyrians, great lord?

OZIAS. Let them await my enquiry where they stand.

FIRST SOLDIER. Lord Ozias, if they flee?

HAGGITH. Hold thy mouth, gaby! Wouldst *thou* flee with thy neck chained to nine necks? Moreover, where will they flee? For the camps of the Assyrians are broken, and in their terrible confusion the Assyrians fall one upon another.

(*The gatemen talk among themselves and stare at the Assyrians outside, who cannot be seen by those within the city. The gates remain open a little.*)

OZIAS (*impatiently*). What is thy tale, Haggith?

HAGGITH. My mistress has slain Holofernes in his tent in the night, and the power of Assyria is undone.

OZIAS (*astounded*). Slain Holofernes! Thou art mad in thy raving.

HAGGITH (*to Ingur*). Open the mouth of the sack, and let my lord behold the head of Holofernes and see that I am mad. (*To soldier.*) A torch, that the Lord Ozias may discover the manner of my raving.

(*Ozias looks into the sack and sees the head of Holofernes.*)

OZIAS. Great is the Lord of Israel!

HAGGITH. And my mistress is the right hand of the Lord.

OZIAS. Great is the Lord of Israel!

VOICES (*deeply moved*). His name shall live for ever.

OZIAS. How did thy mistress accomplish this mighty deed?

HAGGITH. AS for that, she will tell it to my lord with her own voice when she shall come. And now will my lord give ear to the commands of the lady Judith, which she doth lay upon my lord by me, Haggith? First, the head of Holofernes shall be set upon a spear on the highest wall in the great square before the temple. So shall all the Israelites know that God yet watcheth over Israel. (*To the soldiers.*) Take the sack and do as my lady hath ordained by me, Haggith.

OZIAS (*to men, who hesitate*). Take the sack. It is my command.

(*Exeunt two men, L., with sack.*)

HAGGITH. Next, ye shall send men for water to the wells beneath the city that all may drink, for already the Assyrians are fled from the wells, knowing that Holofernes is dead. And ye shall send forth all your army into the valley to fall upon the Assyrians, for they are afraid of the judgment of God, and none dare abide in the sight of his neighbour. Neither can they stand against the chosen race of God.

OZIAS (*to First Soldier*). Let every armed man in the city be roused, and publish the order of Ozias that the Captains lead their bands swiftly into the valley by the secret way to fall upon the Assyrians.

(*Exit First Soldier and another, with joyous cries, L.*)

HAGGITH. Thus hath the lady Judith spoken by me, Haggith.

OZIAS. Whither is thy mistress gone, and why does she tarry?

HAGGITH. My mistress is hidden in a sure place in the valley, for there is one among the Assyrians who fears not God. And he is Bagoas, the chief eunuch of Holofernes, and he has sworn an oath to kill my mistress, for that by guile she did cut off the head of Holofernes. And Bagoas searches for my mistress in the folds of the valley. But he will not find her.

OZIAS (*perturbed*). How knowst thou that he will not find her?

HAGGITH. Because the Lord of Israel is a sharp sword and protecteth his servants.... And also because my mistress is most cunningly hidden.

Enter Charmis, L.

CHARMIS (*joyously excited*). What is the miracle that I hear, Ozias?

OZIAS (*blandly*). There is no miracle; but that which I had planned with the lady Judith has come to pass. Take women and old men Charmis, and go ye to the wells and bring water to the city, for the wells are delivered into my hands.

CHARMIS (*hesitating*). Women and old men? But the onslaught against the Assyrians of which I hear?

OZIAS (*imperiously*). Go quickly. For who is the governor of this city? Is it thou or is it I?

(*Exit Charmis, L.*)

(*Men and women have gathered joyously in the street.*)

VOICES (*mockingly, indicating Ingur, with a tendency to horseplay*). The Assyrian! The Assyrian!

OZIAS. Take him to the guard-house and chain him to Achior.

HAGGITH. He shall not go, lord Ozias. For as my mistress beguiled Holofernes, so did I beguile Ingur, and he is my slave. But I have not cut off his head, and he is dear to me because I have not cut off his head. And he is mine, and let none touch him (*looking at the soldiers*), or my anger, which is the anger of the lady Judith, shall be upon that man. (*Hearing a noise, she glances at the house.*) What do I see? The sluts are in the tent of my mistress, which is forbidden them. Out, sluts! (*Exit angrily into the house!*)

(*Ingur follows her quickly for protection.*)

Enter Messenger.

OZIAS. And you?

MESSENGER (*saluting*). Do my eyes behold the great lord Ozias, governor of Bethulia?

OZIAS. Your eyes behold him.

MESSENGER. It is not yet dawn, nevertheless the streets of the city are full of a great going and coming, but I found none to lead me to the house of the lord Ozias. Yet when I saw my lord's visage my heart said: 'This is he.'

OZIAS. What is your affair with me?

MESSENGER. I am a messenger.

OZIAS (*curtly*). Speak quickly, for the government of this city in this hour is no common matter, and the whole charge of it lies upon me.

MESSENGER. And I am no common messenger. I come with wings through the night from Jerusalem, from Joachim, the high priest.

OZIAS. Ah! (*Changing his tone and beckoning the messenger aside.*) What tidings do you bear?

MESSENGER. I bear the licence from Joachim.

OZIAS. What licence?

MESSENGER. The licence for the people of Bethulia to drink the wine which is sanctified and reserved to the priests which serve the Lord.

OZIAS (*affecting to be puzzled*). Who hath demanded this licence from Joachim?

MESSENGER (*surprised*). The lord Ozias sent a messenger to Jerusalem to beseech that the licence should be granted. And my lord's messenger travelled so swiftly that in the moment when he reached the temple at Jerusalem he fell sick and vomited, and I have come to Bethulia in his place, for after he had vomited he unfolded to me the secret way into the city.

OZIAS (*grandly*). It is true. In the heavy multitude of my cares I had forgotten this matter of the licence.

MESSENGER (*confidentially*). And Joachim hath bidden me to say privily that if any have already in their extremity drunk of the sanctified wine it shall be denied utterly—for the sake of the church.

OZIAS. Ah!

MESSENGER. And here is the licence. (*Offering it.*)

OZIAS. Friend, keep the licence and render it back to Joachim, the high priest in Jerusalem. For I need it not, and I demanded it only by excess of prudence such as becomes the governor of a city besieged and thirsting. But we Bethulians are a faithful and a constant people, and we have trusted in the Most High. And if perchance any have drunk of the sanctified wine unknown to me (*with a grimace*)—it shall be denied utterly, for the sake of seemliness.

MESSENGER. But in the days of trial to come, will not the lord Ozias have need of the licence?

OZIAS (*grandly*). Friend, return ye to Joachim and say to him that the Lord has delivered Bethulia from the Assyrians by the subtlety of his servant Ozias.

MESSENGER (*amazed*). What says my lord?

OZIAS. Yea, this night the head of Holofernes is set on a spear in the square before the temple, and the Assyrians flee one from another in disorder, and my hosts are about to descend upon them and rend them to pieces where they stand foolishly in the valley.

MESSENGER. But this thing is marvellous beyond the understanding of man!

OZIAS. It is indeed marvellous.

MESSENGER. And when Joachim enquires of me who hath taken Holofernes the great captain to behead him, and by what device, what shall I answer to Joachim?

OZIAS. You will answer that Ozias, knowing the weakness of Holofernes, sent down to him secretly a woman, a certain Judith of Bethulia, and upon the counsel of Ozias the woman by wiles compassed the death of Holofernes as I have told you.

MESSENGER. It is a tale which fathers shall tell to their children, and to their children's children, and men shall wonder thereat for all time. And now your servant will say to you a thing which has not been told to him but which his ear has heard. It was said among the mighty that if my lord Ozias should save Judea from the heathen, he would receive notable advancement and be raised up among the great ones of the land. (*Ozias bows.*) Yet will Joachim not be astonished, for it was spoken in Jerusalem that among all the Israelites there is none like the lord Ozias for cunning and obstinacy in defence.

OZIAS (*nettled*). Nevertheless it is meet that Joachim should be astonished, for with five thousand have I set at naught one hundred and two and thirty thousand, and in the chronicles of Israel there is written down no deed to match the delivery of Judea from the Assyrians.

MESSENGER. The God of Israel hath saved Israel.

OZIAS. The God of Israel hath save Israel,—by my hand. Go ye, and when you have eaten and drunk, set ye forth again for Jerusalem.

(*The Messenger salutes and exit, L.*)

(*Throughout this scene excited and joyous men and women frequently pass the street in twos and threes.*)

(*Dawn is breaking and the torches begin to pale.*)

Enter Haggith and Ingur from the house.

OZIAS. Where art thou going?

HAGGITH. Lord Ozias, I came up from the valley to bring water, and to give tidings. Now I go down again to the valley with Ingur and his men to seek out my mistress, and to take new raiment to her, and lead her to the city; for since the Israelites are fallen upon the Assyrians, my mistress is no longer in danger.

Enter Achior.

OZIAS. Slave, who hath dared to loose thee?

ACHIOR. There was none left to guard, and I came forth.

OZIAS (*to a soldier*). Seize this fellow and bind him with fetters.

(*The torches are by this time extinguished.*)

HAGGITH. Lord, it cannot be so. For the lady Judith commanded me to bring Achior also, for her protection, seeing that the youth came from the Assyrians at the bidding of the God of Israel to give comfort to Israel, and for a sign to my mistress.

OZIAS (*after a pause*). I also will go with you, for it is right that the governor should do honour to the lady Judith.

HAGGITH. My mistress commanded me to say to the lord Ozias that he should remain in the city to prepare for her a welcome. (*She points to the gates and Achior gladly moves forward. She takes Ingur by the ear.*) Bestir thy legs, booby!

OZIAS. The subtlety of women is past knowing.

HAGGITH (*at the gates, maliciously*). It may be. But would the lord Ozias invite the displeasure of my mistress? It is day. Let my lord sit in the sun.

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

SCENE: *The same.*

Charmis is alone at the open gates. Glimpses are caught of the people beyond the gates.

TIME: *Afternoon of the same day.*

CHABRIS (*entering to Charmis, at the gates*). They say there is now much water in Bethulia.

CHARMIS. Seeing that I have toiled mightily seven hours this day in charge of six score crazy carriers to carry water up from the wells! Would that Ozias had granted me a whip to sharpen their brains! And now Ozias hath left me in charge of the gates.

CHABRIS. Where is Ozias, and what does he do?

CHARMIS. He stands here beyond the gates to receive Judith and the women who have gone forth to meet her.

CHABRIS. What is the deed of Judith? (*The noise of an approaching procession is heard. Charmis, ignoring Chabris, goes a little outside the gates to watch. Chabris continues in a louder voice.*) The streets of the city are empty. I say the streets of the city are empty.

CHARMIS. Dodderer! The whole city is afoot on the hill-side, and all the Assyrians left alive are fled in panic into the East.

CHABRIS. Then I will return to my house and drink again. No! I will remain, and my eyes shall regard the women, as of old.

Enter through the gates a procession of women (including Rahel), waving branches. At the end of the procession come Haggith and Ingur, and finally Judith, with Achior on one hand, and Ozias on the other. Townspeople and soldiers, garlanded, follow the procession.

BALLET.

OZIAS (*to Judith*). O daughter, blessed be thou above all the women of the earth. Thou art the exaltation of Jerusalem and the great glory of Israel, for the Lord hath directed thee to the cutting off of the head of the chief of our enemies, and thou hast revenged our ruin.

VOICES. So be it.

JUDITH. Holofernes came out of the mountains from the north, and his horsemen covered the hills; and he bragged that he would burn up the borders of Israel, and kill her young men with the sword, and make the virgins as a spoil. But the Almighty Lord hath disappointed the Assyrians by the hand of a woman; and my sandals ravished the eye of Holofernes, and my beauty took his mind prisoner, and the knife passed through his neck. Let all creatures serve the Lord!

VOICES. So be it!

OZIAS. Charmis, I appoint you to lead the people to the Temple, where are the banners of the Assyrians which we have captured this day, and each woman shall take a banner, and all shall return to this place before the house of the Lady Judith.

CHARMIS (*swollen with pride*). I obey, lord Ozias.

(*The procession begins to move away, L. Haggith displays her importance and bullies Ingur, who accompanies her.*)

RAHEL (*to Chabris*). What, grandad! You are abroad once more! (*She takes him with her like a*

disobedient child.)

(Exeunt, processionally, all except Judith, Ozias and Achior.)

OZIAS *(to Achior)*. Thou goest not with the people?

JUDITH *(to Achior)*. Stay, I pray you, Achior.

OZIAS *(to Judith, with growing excitement)*. I wish to speak privily with the lady Judith, *now!*

JUDITH. Let us speak here.

OZIAS. Shall we not go into your house, you and I?

JUDITH. My house is not ready to receive you, Ozias.

OZIAS. Let it be so. But before Achior I will not speak.

JUDITH. Achior, go into my house, and do honour to my dwelling, and repose in it.

ACHIOR. Gladly, O lady! *(Exit into the house.)*

JUDITH. What is the urgency that oppresses you, Ozias, and why are you troubled in the hour of triumph?

OZIAS *(losing control of himself)*. Who is the heathen Achior that you should prefer him and make your mouth sweet to him?

JUDITH. Leave Achior, and let us come at once to the matter that presses.

OZIAS. Oh! I will not speak smoothly for a pretence! Thou knowest that my jealousy smokes against Achior. Yea, and against Holofernes also.

JUDITH. But Holofernes is dead.

OZIAS. Before he went down to his place, didst thou not sin with him?

JUDITH. As the Lord liveth, my countenance deceived him to his destruction, yet did he not shame me.

OZIAS. Blessed be our God!

JUDITH. But how does this matter touch thee, and what is my virtue in thy regard?

OZIAS. Let Holofernes suffice thee, and drive not me also to death with the softness of thy voice. Art thou not aware that the soul of my soul burns for thee and will not wait—the more so since thou hast done a mighty deed and art proved a woman beyond all women?

JUDITH. Nay! I have done naught; but the Lord hath saved Israel by *thy* hand.

OZIAS. What is this humbleness?

JUDITH. AS I came towards the city with Achior, the messenger from Jerusalem met us in the way, and he was full to bursting of the word of Ozias, and that Ozias had delivered Israel, and that what I did I did by thy device and at thy command. But the messenger in speaking knew not that he spoke to Judith, and I let him go.

OZIAS. Judith—

JUDITH. Yet it seems to me that thou wast ignorant of all that which I went out to do, and my plan was hidden from thee.

OZIAS *(powerfully persuasive)*. Hearken to me, Judith. I swear it was for thee that I boasted. My aim was that thy mighty deed should gain preferment in Jerusalem. But thou art a woman and therefore preferment is not for thee. Yet now by reason of my boasting I shall be greatly advanced and lifted up, and in all Judea there will be none higher than me, and thus wilt thou also be advanced and lifted up.

JUDITH. I desire no preferment.

OZIAS. But I would have it in thy behalf; and my appetite is double. I rage for glory and dominion, and I rage also for thee. And I will offer thee glory and dominion, for I seek these things as a gift to thy beauty. And if I cannot lay them on thy lap my heel shall spurn mankind and I will tread it to dust. My desires are terrible; they will not be withstood; they consume me daily, but daily I am renewed. I am on fire, but by the fierceness of the fire I am strengthened. I was conceived for greatness and my mother bore me for mastery, and the huge earth shall shake with the terror of my commands.... And I am held between thy fingers.

JUDITH. I deny not thy greatness.

OZIAS. Surely thou canst not. For thou too art great. And my greatness yearns to thine.

JUDITH. Wilt thou listen?

OZIAS. I hear.

JUDITH. With this greatness of thine goes deceit and laxity of mind.

OZIAS. Yet when thou didst thy mighty deed didst thou not deceive cruelly?

JUDITH. I deceived not for myself, but for Israel; and my guile was for the glory of God. But thy heart is set only upon advancement and power, which is corruption.

OZIAS. Judith, canst thou not lift thy thoughts beyond good and evil, and canst thou not contemplate the marvellous greatness of man? I will abase myself before none but thee, and in my ear there is no commandment but thine; and all other decrees will I mock. I would have thee in marriage, and I would have no other but thee. Wilt thou take me to thee, and wilt thou yield thyself without fear to the terrible flame of my love? For thus shalt thou fulfil thyself and me. But give heed before thou answerest, and know that if thou turnest from me, I will make all the nations of the earth to tremble with my fury.

JUDITH. Thou art great also in thy loving.

OZIAS. Once thou didst love me.

JUDITH. Nay! I but looked upon thee in kindness. But now I will not go to thee in marriage.

OZIAS (*half admiring*). Thou art not then afraid of my wrath!

JUDITH. I am Judith.

OZIAS (*with a fresh access of violence*). Thou hungerest for Achior. Wouldst thou marry a heathen, thou a Hebrew woman?

JUDITH. And thou, if I had not accomplished the will of the Lord, and if thou hadst been carried to Babylon as thou saidst, wouldst thou not have denied the Most High and gone after other gods? But Achior believeth in our God, and this day will be joined into the house of Israel.

OZIAS (*savagely scornful*). What is Achior but a simpleton!

JUDITH. It may be. But I love him and he shall rule me ... for he came hither for a sign from the Lord.

OZIAS (*savagely resentful*). Oh! If I did not love thee, would I not undo thee!

JUDITH. Thou! Thou art Ozias, but I am she who cut off the head of a mightier than thou, even Holofernes in his tent. Go thy ways and fulfil greatness. As for me I will remain obediently in my house, and truth and righteousness shall reign in my house.

(*The procession returns, the women bearing the banners of the Assyrians. Achior enters from the house.*)

(*Judith is crowned with olives.*)

JUDITH. And now let the priests and the elders enter with me into my house, and Achior shall follow them, so that he may be received into Israel, and I will be betrothed to him with all the ceremonies of the law, for he came to me as a messenger from God. And when the marriage has been performed, I will submit myself to him as a wife to her husband.

HAGGITH. And let Ingur also be received into Israel, for he has repented of his idolatries. And he shall be my husband, yet shall he not rule me.

OZIAS. Brethren, hearken! This night I go to Jerusalem, for I am called to higher things, because I have delivered Israel. And I shall not return to this little city; but ye will have tidings of me in the years to come, and ye will say proudly to the strangers within your gates: He was a Bethulian and once he ruled over us.

JUDITH. The lord Ozias is called to greatness. Peace go with him.

ALL. So be it.

CURTAIN.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JUDITH, A PLAY IN THREE ACTS; FOUNDED
ON THE APOCRYPHAL BOOK OF JUDITH ***

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