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JOHN THE BAPTIST

**JOHN THE BAPTIST
A PLAY
BY HERMANN SUDERMANN**

**TRANSLATED BY
BEATRICE MARSHALL**

LONDON
JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD VIGO STREET W.
NEW YORK JOHN LANE COMPANY MCMIX

WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON, LTD., PRINTERS, PLYMOUTH

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

HEROD ANTIPAS.	<i>Tetrarch of Galilee.</i>
HERODIAS.	
SALOME.	<i>Her daughter.</i>
VITELLIUS.	<i>Legate of Syria.</i>
MARCELLUS.	<i>His companion.</i>
MEROKLES, <i>the rhetorician</i>	
GABALOS, <i>the Syrian.</i>	} <i>At the Court of Herod.</i>
JABAD, <i>the Levite.</i>	
JOHN.	<i>Called "The Baptist."</i>
JOSAPHAT.	
MATTHIAS.	} <i>His disciples.</i>
AMARJA.	
MANASSA.	
JAEL.	<i>Josaphat's wife.</i>
THEIR TWO CHILDREN.	
HADIDJA.	<i>Maid in the Palace.</i>
MIRIAM.	
ABI.	} <i>Playfellows of Salome.</i>
MAECHA.	
MESULEMETH.	<i>A beggar-woman.</i>
AMASAI.	
JORAB.	} <i>Pharisees.</i>
ELIAKIM.	
PASUR.	} <i>Citizens of Jerusalem.</i>
HACHMONI.	
SIMON. <i>The Galilean.</i>	
FIRST GALILEAN.	
SECOND GALILEAN.	
A PARALYTIC.	
FIRST PRIEST.	

SECOND PRIEST.

A CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM.

THE COMMANDER OF THE ROMAN SOLDIERS.

FIRST

SECOND

THIRD

THE CAPTAIN OF THE PALACE GUARD.

THE GAOLER.

MEN AND WOMEN FROM JERUSALEM, PILGRIMS, ROMAN LEGIONARIES, MEN AND MAIDSERVANTS IN THE PALACE.

} Roman Soldier.

TIME OF ACTION. *The Year 29 after Christ.*

SCENE OF ACTION. *During the Prelude a rocky wilderness near Jerusalem.*

IN THE FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD ACTS. *Jerusalem.*

IN THE FOURTH AND FIFTH ACTS. *A town of Galilee.*

PRELUDE

PRELUDE

Wild, rocky scenery in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem.... Night--The moon shining dimly through jagged clouds.... In the distance is seen the fire of the great sacrificial altar, burning on the horizon.

SCENE I

Dark shadows flit in groups across the background from right to left.

MIRIAM

Hadidja, I am afraid!

HADIDJA

Come!

MIRIAM

I am afraid. Seest thou not those gliding shadows? Their feet scarce touch the stones, and their flesh is like the shadow of the night-wind.

HADIDJA

Fool that thou art! Thou art afraid of thy companions in misery and suffering. The same need as thine brings them hither; the same hope leads them on to the heights.

MIRIAM

Do they also wish to go to him?

HADIDJA

Every one wishes to go to him. Is there a light in Israel which doth not irradiate from his hand? Is there water for the thirsty which doth not flow from him? Streams of sweet water gush forth from these dead stones, and his voice is born out of silence.

MIRIAM

But I am afraid of him. Why dwelleth he among the terrors of the desert? Why flieth he from the paths of the joyous, and shunneth the suffering?

HADIDJA

The joyous need him not. The suffering will find their way to him.

MIRIAM

Look, Hadidja! There is the glow of fire yonder above Jerusalem. The Romans are burning down our houses, and yet we tarry here!

HADIDJA

What! Dost thou not know that is the great altar on which, day and night, the priests offer up a tenth part of the sweat of our brows?

MIRIAM

[*In horrified amazement.*] And would he let the great altar fall too?

HADIDJA

I know not. But what he willeth is best. See--who is coming?

SCENE II

The same; two men, half carrying, half dragging a paralytic who moans.

FIRST MAN

Women, say, have ye met the great Rabbi whom men call the Baptist?

HADIDJA

We also are seeking the Baptist.

[*The Paralytic, moaning.*] Put me down; let me die!

FIRST MAN

We have carried this palsied man here in our arms, and they are weary, and he whom we hoped to find is not here.

THE PARALYTIC

[*With a groan.*] I shall die!

MANASSA'S VOICE

[*Crying aloud from the right.*] John! John!

MANASSA

[*Rushing on the scene.*] John, where art thou, John? I cry unto thee in my distress. Have mercy; let me behold thee, John!

MIRIAM

[*Pointing to the left.*] Look! A crowd of people are drawing near. They go before him.

HADIDJA

Kneel; for it is he.

SCENE III

The same. John, behind him a number of men and women, among them Amarja.

JOHN

Whose wretchedness is so great that he wails aloud, and forgets that grief should be silent?

MANASSA

[*Kneeling before him.*] Rabbi, mighty Rabbi. If thou art he of whom men are talking in the streets of Jerusalem, help me, save me!

JOHN

Stand up and speak.

MANASSA

I am Manassa, the son of Jeruel, and my father was sick and blind; and I lived with him on the road to Gibeon, close by the well which is never dry. And men came unto me who said, "It is the will of the Lord our God that ye refuse to pay tribute to the Romans," and I refused to pay the Romans tribute. Then have the soldiers fallen on me and burned my house, and my young wife

hath perished in the flames, and my father, who was blind. And I am now left alone and desolate. Help me, Rabbi! Help!

JOHN

Am I lord over Life and Death that I can make thy father, wife, and child alive again? Can I build up thy house once more out of its ashes? What dost thou ask of me?

MANASSA

Then cursed be those who----

JOHN

Stop! Cursings enough hang over us. Israel is loaded with them, like the autumn boughs with ripe grapes. Wherefore dost thou lament? Look before, instead of behind. If thou canst not withhold thy lamentations, put a gag between thy teeth; for prayer should be silent, and longing and patience without sound.

MANASSA

How shall that help me, Rabbi, in my loneliness and desolation?

JOHN

Thou speakest sinfully. Is He not with thee?

MANASSA

Rabbi! Who?

AMARJA

Hearken! He hath not heard the news of Him Who cometh!

JOHN

Know'st thou not that soon there will be rejoicing in Israel? Bridal garments and music of cymbals! Know'st thou not that there will be no more sorrow in Israel? Therefore wipe the foam from thy lips and sanctify thyself.

ALL

Sanctify thyself!

MANASSA

No more sorrow. No more suffering! Rabbi, say that I may stay with thee?

JOHN

Mix with thy fellows over there and learn silence.

MANASSA

[*Stammering.*] Rabbi! [*He withdraws.*]

JOHN

I see not Josaphat among ye. Neither is Matthias here. Who hath tidings of them?

AMARJA

Rabbi, none hath seen them.

JOHN

Who is that lying on the ground groaning?

THE PARALYTIC

Master, I am a poor man, sick of a palsy and in great agony. If Thou canst not cure me, I must die!

JOHN

Die *now!* Now, when One is at hand Who bringeth relief for thy tumours and balm for thy sores? I say unto Thee thou wilt thank the Lord thy God with shouts of joy for every hour of thy pain, for every inch of the road thou hast crawled along on inflamed knees, when thou beholdest Him for Whom our soul longeth and hopeth, for Whose coming we wait and watch by the roadside, looking towards the East. Therefore endure sevenfold suffering and groan no more.

THE PARALYTIC

Rabbi, thou hast done wonders for me. I feel no longer--I---[*He makes an effort to rise, but sinks back. His companions lead him away. He breathes more easily, laughing as he goes.*]

MURMUR OF PEOPLE

See! a miracle. He works miracles!

ONE OF THE PEOPLE

Truly the word is fulfilled--Elias is risen. The Great Prophet is risen from the dead!

ANOTHER

No, not Elias, not the Prophet! See ye not, ye blind? It is He Himself! He is the promised One. Worship Him! worship Him!

ALL

[*Falling on their knees.*] Worship Him!

JOHN

A man sick of a fever crawled along the road looking for the physician, and when a beggar or a slave came by, carrying water, he fell on his knees before him and cried, "Hail to thee, great physician! Thank God, thou art come!" And so he went on till evening, and the children mocked him. [*The people rise slowly.*] What have I, the beggar, to give you? The water I carry is to baptize you in; it is the pure water of repentance. But He Who cometh after me will baptize with fire and the Spirit, and I am not worthy to unlatch His shoes, ... so little am I compared with Him.

SEVERAL

Rabbi, tell us, when will He come of Whom thou speakest?

OTHERS

Who is it, Rabbi? Be merciful and strengthen our souls. Speak to us of Him.

JOHN

Then sit ye down in a circle and hear the oft-told tidings, ye insatiable ones. [*The people crouch on the ground.*]

MIRIAM

Hadidja, what is he going to tell us?

HADIDJA

Be silent.

MIRIAM

Let me take thy hand, Hadidja.

JOHN

It was on the banks of Jordan that I baptized all, according to the command of the Lord. Many people were gathered round me and hearkened to what I preached, but my soul was consumed with doubt and misgiving. Then, lo, a youth came down from the cliffs above, and he was alone, and all the people drew back. And as I raised my eyes to his face, I knew that this was He, for the glory of eternity shone round about Him. And when He spake with me, and prayed me to baptize Him as if He were a sinner, I trembled and refused, saying, "I would be baptized by Thee, but *Thou* comest to me?" And He made answer, "So be it, for thus shall the law be fulfilled." Then I yielded, and let it be as He desired. And when He had received Baptism from my trembling hand, He rose from the water, and behold, the Heavens opened above Him and I saw the Holy Ghost descending like a white dove, and He was bathed in the Heavenly light. And a voice out of Heaven spake, "Behold, this is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Then I fell on my face and prayed. And I was no longer afraid.

ONE OF THE CROWD

[*After a pause.*] And whence came He, He Who was thus illumined by the radiance of the Lord?

ALL

Yes, whence came He, and whither did He go? Didst thou not hold Him?

JOHN

Plague me not with questions. He cometh and goeth, and no man holdeth Him. At this very hour He may be sitting in our midst.

ALL

[*Turn on each other a scared and inquiring gaze.*]

AMARJA

Rabbi, we are all poor workpeople from Jerusalem, and every one knoweth his fellow.

ONE OF THE CROWD

[*Pointing to Miriam.*] Yes, we men! But here is a woman whom I never saw before.

HADIDJA

Her name is Miriam, and she serves as maid in the Palace, as I do.

JOHN

Leave her in peace.

ANOTHER

But if He of Whom thou speakest dwells among the living, He must bear a name, and His Father's name.

ALL

Yea; tell us His name. His name?

JOHN

Ye would hear his name? Listen to the wind whispering among the rocks, mark well what it saith ere it vanisheth. So His name, heard first here and then there, passed by my ear. I am waiting with prayer and anxiety to hear it again. Therefore I say unto you, Question me not further, lest it melt away like a dream when the cock croweth.

AMARJA

Yet give us withal some guidance. Whence came He to thee--He----

JOHN

The wind which wafted Him to me blew from Galilee.

ALL

From Galilee!

ONE

Is then the Messiah the Galileans', the fisheaters'?

ANOTHER

He shall come to us Judæans! Up, and let us seek Him!

ALL

Aye, let us seek Him!

JOHN

Think ye that He will permit Himself to be found by you? Ye miserable creatures full of mutiny and revolt! Who are ye that ye should alter the course of the world's history by a hair's breadth? When the time for His harvest is ripe, then He shall appear to you of His own free will in glory as the Lord of Hosts. The four cherubim shall ride before Him on caparisoned horses, with flaming sickles in their hands.... Whatsoever hath been planted in sin and hath grown up rankly, that shall be mown down, root and branch; whatsoever hath reared itself against Him shall be trampled upon. Therefore, ye men of Israel, root up the weeds that flourish and encumber your bodies, so that ye do not rot, and in your corruption are not swept away with your polluters when *He* draweth near with the seven-coloured rainbow about His head. He Who shall come must come [*reflectively*], must come!

ONE OF THE CROWD

Rabbi, we have repented of our sins. We pray day and night, and our bodies are emaciated from fasting. Say, what more can we do?

SCENE IV

The same. Josaphat. Matthias.

JOHN

Josaphat, so thou art here. And thou, Matthias.

JOSAPHAT

Master, chide us not for having lingered. We paused by Herod's Palace, which, as a rule, is dark and deserted. We saw rosy lights kindled, and the pillars garlanded with flowers. Fresh ignominy shall befall Israel, more deadly sin weigh upon her, if thou, Rabbi, comest not to the rescue.

JOHN

Speak out!

JOSAPHAT

Herod hath not come out of Galilee, as every year before, for the Passover. He is not expected till to-morrow. Another guest hath arrived. The wife of Philip, Herod's brother, hath deserted him, and taken with her Salome, Philip's daughter.

The guest at the Palace is called Herodias, and to-morrow the marriage feast is to be celebrated.

JOHN

Between Herod and the wife of his own brother?

JOSAPHAT

Thou sayest right, Rabbi.

JOHN

No! No! Whoever hath told thee this informed thee falsely. His lips were shameless, and his soul lied.

AMARJA

Pardon, Rabbi; there are maids here belonging to the Palace.... Question them.

JOHN

Hadidja, I know thee. Speak!

HADIDJA

Rabbi, my place is menial. I only hear what the idle gossips say. But here is Miriam. She has been chosen as the playmate of the young maiden Salome since she came yesterday. She waits on her at the bath. Question her!

JOHN

Miriam, why art thou silent?

HADIDJA

Rabbi, she hath never yet conversed with strangers.

MIRIAM

[*In a low, stuttering tone.*] Master, it is true what that man saith. And---[*Emotion.*]

JOHN

Continue!

MIRIAM

And after the wedding, on the first day of the Passover, Herodias is to enter the Temple, as far as the women's outer court, her new consort leading her by the hand. They will show themselves to the people.

JOHN

That the people may stone them? But what am I saying? They dare not! Those priests, lustful as they are, cowards cringing in the dust at the feet of the Romans, dare not permit this! The iron gates will close upon the scandal, and the High Priest will stretch forth his arm to curse them!

HADIDJA

Speak, Miriam!

JOHN

What else hast thou to say, Miriam?

MIRIAM

Master, at this very hour, messengers are passing to and fro between Herodias and the

Temple. The Princess desireth that the High Priest shall meet them at the second gate, where the men and women separate, to bless her----

JOHN

Enough! Go home, all of you. I wish to be alone. To-morrow ye will see me at Jerusalem. [*Horror amongst the people.*]

ONE OF THE CROWD

Rabbi, wilt thou be responsible for thy enemies?

OTHERS

Reflect, Rabbi! The Pharisees will trap thee. The priests will condemn thee.

JOHN

I am the son of a priest. I will speak priestly words to those who countenance this infamous crime. I will speak to them in the name of Him Who cometh, for Whom I prepare the way. Go! [*As they appear unwilling and hesitate.*] Go! [*The curtain falls.*]

FIRST ACT

FIRST ACT

Square in front of the Palace of Herod--The guardroom of the Roman soldiers is to the right of the Palace in the foreground, with benches before the door--To the right of centre is the chief entrance--Steps in background, which lead to the top of a hill--Behind, separated by an invisible valley, is a view of rising masses of house-tops belonging to another part of the town--A narrow street to the left of centre, and another street in foreground, which may be taken as a continuation of the one that runs to right of guard-room--In it is the shop of the woollen merchant ELIAKIM--At its right corner the shop of the fruit-seller PASUR, with wares exhibited--A fountain with seats round it, near the middle of the stage.

SCENE I

Eliakim, Pasur. First, second, third common soldiers.

PASUR

[*As he comes forward glances anxiously at the soldiers, who sit in front of guard-room.*]
Neighbour, neighbour, dost thou not hear me?

ELIAKIM

[*Sitting outside his shop reading a parchment*] It is written that whosoever disturbeth a man when he is reading the law shall forfeit his life.

PASUR

Thou readest the law?

ELIAKIM

Knowest thou not that I read the law day and night?

PASUR

Forgive me, neighbour; accuse me not. I sinned out of ignorance.... I was in fear of the soldiers who are quartered yonder ... but I am going in. [*Slinks back to his shop.*]

FIRST SOLDIER

[*To the second who sharpens his sword.*] Marcus, wherefore handiest thou thy blade with such terrific zeal? There is naught to hew down in there. These damned Judeans have had enough. They'll rebel no more.

SECOND SOLDIER

Who can tell? Since that woman entered there yesterday, my nostrils have scented bloodshed. Everything is upside down in Herod's house, and your so-called princes are ticklish subjects.

FIRST SOLDIER

Here in Judea they have none; so we are masters.

SECOND SOLDIER

We are masters everywhere, with or without a Herod.

FIRST SOLDIER

What brings the Tetrarch of Galilee to Jerusalem?

SECOND SOLDIER

Yes, well mayest thou ask! Yet he cometh twice or thrice in the year to rub his nose on the fleeces of the Temple, and then away he goes again. God requires it of him, so they say. A crazy people!

FIRST SOLDIER

And we must stand by as guard of honour. A nice business for a Roman citizen!

SCENE II

The same, Hadidja and two other maids (with jugs on their heads, come out of the Palace and go to the well, where they draw water).

SECOND SOLDIER

Idiot! We are bound to do it, so that we may appear to honour him. In reality we guard him. He will soon be here now.

THIRD SOLDIER

[*Who has been squatting on a brick, without taking any part in conversation, sings.*] Sweet smiling Lalage, thee will I love for ever. Thee, sweet smiling Lalage----

SECOND SOLDIER

[*Irritably.*] Have done howling after thy Lalage! Before thou goest back to Rome again, she will be a grandmother.

THIRD SOLDIER

[*Stretching out his arms.*] Alack! Yes.

SECOND SOLDIER

[*Pointing to the maids.*] Are not there women enough here?

THIRD SOLDIER

Ah! but they are Jew girls. They mean well enough, but the punishment of death hangs over them.

SECOND SOLDIER

A crazy people.

THIRD SOLDIER

If only there were no foreigners! I, for my part, take not kindly to these Asiatics. They wash all day long, and yet stink in spite of it.... Ha! yesterday a Syrian sweetheart made me a present of a necklace. There it is. Shall we dice for it?

SECOND SOLDIER

Show it to me. I say fifty denarii.

THIRD SOLDIER

Rogue! A hundred and fifty!

SECOND SOLDIER

Very well.

FIRST SOLDIER

I will join.

THIRD SOLDIER

Come along. [*All three disappear into the guard-room.*]

SCENE III

Eliakim, Pasur, Hadidja, and the two other maids. Two Priests [descending the central steps].

FIRST PRIEST

Damsels, you belong to the Palace?

HADIDJA

Yes, ye priests.

FIRST PRIEST

Announce us to your mistress.

HADIDJA

Our mistress, priests, is gone forth to meet the Tetrarch Herod, to receive him at the gates.

FIRST PRIEST

When will she return?

HADIDJA

That we cannot say, priests; it depends on the coming of the Prince.

FIRST PRIEST

Do you desire our blessing?

HADIDJA

No! [*She vanishes with the other maids into the interior of the Palace.*]

BOTH PRIESTS

[*Look discomposed.*]

FIRST PRIEST

[*Observing Eliakim and Pasur sitting in front of their doors, raises his hands unctuously.*]
Blessed be ye who----

ELIAKIM

No one asked thy blessing!

BOTH PRIESTS

[*Regard each other in dismay.*]

SECOND PRIEST

[*Furiously.*] These again are of the school of the Pharisees!

FIRST PRIEST

We hold the Temple. They shall yet be our servants. Come! [*Exeunt both priests.*]

SCENE IV

PASUR

[*Drawing near humbly.*] Forgive me, neighbour, but now thou no longer readest in the law?

ELIAKIM

No.

PASUR

This will be a sorry Passover for us tradesmen. See all this fine stock which I have laid in. There is the sacred pomegranate wood, whereon to roast the lamb. Here are the sweet herbs, with which to prepare the holy broth, and here are the bitter roots, the garlic, cresses, and bay leaves, all according to the precept. In six, or at latest seven hours the feast begins, and I shall be left stranded with my whole stock on hand. Oh, woe is me! Woe is me!

ELIAKIM

Well, have I not also superior and holy wares for sale? There are stuffs of the very finest quality. Beautiful tassels of white and hyacinth-blue wool. And are not my Tephillims the most beautiful ever worn by a son of Abraham at morning prayer? Nay, Abraham himself never wore a finer Tephillim. I believe I have eighteen dozen or more. But one should take no thought of bodily raiment, but read the Scriptures. So it is written.

PASUR

But, neighbour, the man who deals in vegetables does not find it so easy to be righteous in the sight of the Lord. Thy woollen goods will keep till Herod is gone again with his new wife.

ELIAKIM

[*Shakes his fist at the Palace.*] It's a shame, a crying shame!

PASUR

Yes; once this was always a good spot for business, but now grass groweth in front of the Palace.

ELIAKIM

Only *priests* go in and out.

SCENE V

The same. A citizen of Jerusalem [who comes to fill his pitcher at the fountain].

CITIZEN

[Distressfully.] Neighbour, dear neighbour!

ELIAKIM

What is thy trouble?

CITIZEN

Thou art a righteous man and knowest the law. Give me advice, and thou shalt have my thanks. My poor wife has hurt her foot while working in the fields. It is burning and swollen, and I bathe it with cold water from the fountain, which does it good. But in a short time beginneth the feast. May I continue with the bathing then?

ELIAKIM

Sabbath breaking. Thou wilt be guilty, and deserve death.

THE CITIZEN

Oh, Lord eternal!

ELIAKIM

Yes. If it were her throat that ailed, then thou mightest pour the remedy into her mouth. But foot! No!

CITIZEN

But suppose that it mortifies!

ELIAKIM

Yea, if it mortifies and is a danger to life, the law alloweth it.

THE CITIZEN

[Crying out in despair.] But then it is too late!

[Meanwhile a man wrapt in a cloak has come down the street, and looks up calmly at the windows of Herod's Palace.]

ELIAKIM

[Points to him, looking shocked.] Hush, if thou lovest thy life! The man thou seest yonder is one David, belonging to the Zealots who dwell in the desert. They come down to the towns with daggers hidden in the folds of their cloaks. And when they find people committing a breach of the law by word or deed, they strike at them from behind. *[Rising, as the stranger approaches.]* Greeting; thou holy man! Behold I know thee well. Wilt thou not bless thy servant? *[The stranger passes, and disappears in the street to the left.]*

PASUR

I feel a shiver run through me. One can err and not know it.

THE CITIZEN

How many hours are there yet, ere the feast begins?

ELIAKIM

[*Regarding the sun.*] Six.

THE CITIZEN

So long, then, I may use the cooling remedy, but I know not what to do afterwards. [*Drags his pitcher away dejectedly.*]

PASUR

Of a truth, we Hebrews are hunted like vermin. If the Romans leave us alone, the law strikes at us.

SCENE VI

The same. The stage has become half-filled with people, who gesticulate in excitement, looking up at Herod's Palace. Among them Hachmoni; later, the soldiers.

ELIAKIM

What is going on there? Hachmoni, thou shalt speak. What ails the people?

HACHMONI

Hast thou not heard? John is in the town!

ELIAKIM

There are many Johns.

HACHMONI

The Baptist, man!

ELIAKIM

The Baptist; enemy of the Priests and of the Pharisees; to whom every Rechabite hath sworn death. Is he caught at last?

HACHMONI

Thou speakest like one in his sleep! If there is a man in Jerusalem safe and untouched by the curse of the Romans, it is he. He standeth in the market-place and preacheth; he standeth at the gates and preacheth.--Did I say *preach*? Firebrands issue from his lips; scorpions leap out of his

mouth.

ELIAKIM

Against whom doth he preach, then?

HACHMONI

Against Herod, naturally. And his paramour, and his paramour's whelp.

ALL

Down with Herod! Death to Herod!

[The first and second Roman soldiers step out of the guard-room.]

FIRST SOLDIER

What are the blear-eyed scum crying?

SECOND SOLDIER

Death to Herod! Did not I say it would be so? I can trust my nose. *[Draws his sword.]*

PASUR

Protect yourselves! The soldiers! *[The people fall back.]*

FIRST SOLDIER *[laughing.]*

The dogs are affrighted already. Curs! *[They go in, laughing.]*

SCENE VII

The same. Amasai and Jorab [from left centre, remain in the street].

AMASAI

Look at them! Must this not appear a mad mockery in the sight of the Lord? Who that follows the straight path laid down by the law, after the manner of God-fearing men, can have anything in common with these sinners?

JORAB

They are infatuated with the Baptist's preaching, and yet too weak to kick against the pricks. Speak to them, so that they come to themselves.

AMASAI

After the Baptist? Rather would I grasp a mad bull by the horns. They would go up to the Temple to make an offering of sow's blood, if he bade them do it.

JORAB

Cannot we trap him?

AMASAI

And so stand before the people as the friends of Herod? Leave that kind of fame to the Priests and the Sadducees. The disaffection which we quelled, at a signal from him, screams aloud in the gutter. So what good have we done? That is why the people flock to him. We have missed our opportunity. But still; I know a way to entangle him. I will strike at him through his folly about the Messiah. [*Shouts of applause arise from the people.*] Listen! so they once hailed us. [*They withdraw further into the street to the left.*]

SCENE VII

The same, without Amasai and Jorab. John, accompanied by Josaphat, Matthias, and Manassa and afresh crowd. People appear behind left.

JOHN

[Throwing himself down on the edge of the fountain.]

JOSAPHAT

See, Rabbi, what power hath been given thee. They wag their tails like pleased hounds. Jerusalem the Blessed lies at thy feet.

JOHN

Give me to drink!

MANASSA

[Draws him water.]

HACHMONI

Behold! The great prophet drinks as if he were one of us---

PASUR

That is goat's hair wherewith he is clothed. It must prick his skin. It shows what a holy man he is.

ELIAKIM

But he doth not favour the woollen trade. If all were so holy, we should be beggared.

HACHMONI

And his food, people say, is nought but locusts and wild honey.

MATTHIAS

Get back. See ye not that ye plague him? [*They retire.*]

JOSAPHAT

Rabbi, forgive. The people wait. What is thy command to them?

JOHN

Is this Herod's house?

JOSAPHAT

Yes, Rabbi [*silence*]. Rabbi, say, what shall they do?

JOHN

Am I the keeper of these people? The shepherd may drive his flock through thorns or flowers. I pine for the wilderness, for my rocky fastnesses.

JOSAPHAT

[*Dismayed.*] Rabbi!

JOHN

I have awakened the slumbering conscience, scourged and roused the idle, shown the erring the right road. One great burst of indignation against Herod now flames towards heaven. So now they may let me go my way, or send their spies after me. But no priest has yet dared to stand in my path. It is well. My work in Jerusalem is at an end.

MATTHIAS

Not so, Rabbi. Thy work only beginneth. We have to face the Prince's entry. The people want a leader.

JOHN

Whither will they be led?

MATTHIAS

That we know not, Rabbi.

JOHN

And do I know? Am I one to subject my will to the fetters of a plan, or to spin a web of calculations for others? I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. That is my destiny. Come! [*He stands up.*]

THE PEOPLE

Hail to thee, John! Hail! [*As he is going, Amasai and Jorab step in his way.*]

SCENE VIII

AMASAI

Pardon us, great Prophet, that we have not yet been present at thy baptisms.

JOHN

Who are ye?

JOSAPHAT

[*Whispering.*] Be on your guard, Rabbi. They wear the wide hem of the Pharisees. Their brethren are high in the Council.

AMASAI

We are diligent scribes, simple men, to whom the study of the law hath brought more honour than we deserve.

JOHN

May be. But what do ye want with me?

AMASAI

Many reports of miracles worked by thee have come to our ears. Some say thou art Elias; and others, even greater than he. We are willing to believe this, even if thou performest not his miracles. Naturally thou mayest have reasons in thy heart for keeping thy power of miracle-working a secret from us.

PASUR

Hath he worked miracles?

ELIAKIM

Not for me.

PASUR

Ah!

AMASAI

We have heard, too, much of thy godliness; that thou fastest and prayest as one to whom meat and drink and earthly intercourse are of no account. We fast and pray also, and our desire for doing good cannot be satisfied. But the law is harder and more zealous than we. Therefore we beg thee to be so gracious as to bestow on us the benefit of thy teaching, Rabbi, and to tell us how we can keep the law.

JOHN

So? Ye lay traps for me under the cloak of your glib words. Ye generation of vipers! Who hath told you that ye shall escape the wrath to come? Woe unto you, when He cometh Who is stronger than I! He hath His sickle already in His hand. He will gather the grain into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with everlasting fire.

PASUR

Of whom doth he speak?

HACHMONI

Hush! he speaks of the Messiah.

ELIAKIM

What Messiah?

JORAB

Come, Amasai. I am afraid of this man.

AMASAI

[*Shielding himself with his hand.*] We approached thee as petitioners, and thou hast abused us. We will let that pass, presuming that thou hast a right thereto. The one of whom thou speakest as coming after thee has given thee the right. Is it not so? [*Silence.*] Behold, ye people of Israel, your prophet is silent. If it be not the Messiah, the Messiah of Whom he preaches in the wilderness, and even in the market-place, who hath given him the right to chide us? Where else hath he obtained his authority? Ye know what we are, God-fearing, upright men, that strive to obey the law in everything.

ONE OF THE PEOPLE

Who is this?

ELIAKIM

Amasai, the wise and learned scribe.

PEOPLE

[*Murmuring.*] Listen, it is Amasai.

ANOTHER

Rabbi, wilt thou not bless us?

AMASAI

Yea, we, in short, who are a piece of the law ourselves. And we have never done this man any harm. If he is an enemy to us, it must be because he is an enemy to the law.

JOHN

Thou liest.

AMASAI

Good. If I lie, so teach me, great prophet, how thou keepest the law.

JOSAPHAT

[*In a low voice.*] Yes, Rabbi, explain! The people expect it.

JOHN

I have nothing to do with the law, of which ye and your like set up to be guardians and students. [*Sensation among the people.*]

JOSAPHAT

[*Sotto voce.*] Rabbi, think what thou art saying. Injure not thyself.

JOHN

Nay, it is not your law, but ye yourselves that I hate. For your hand lieth heavily on this people, and your well-being is its affliction.

AMASAI

That thou hast yet to prove, great prophet.

JOHN

Who are ye, ye men of worldly wisdom, that ye should look on the law as your special inheritance and possession? Here is an enslaved people crawling patiently on its belly beneath a scourge, oppressed by a heavy burden, and ye desire to tell it *how* it shall crawl.

AMASAI

Yea, because it must crawl somehow, great prophet.

JOHN

Ye think so. I say that it shall rise out of the dust.

AMASAI

Thus have rebels ever spoken, and the end hath always been the cross and the gallows. Thou, whom men call the great prophet, listen to me! When the Lord redeemed His people the first time, how did He do it? Through the law. And when He redeemed them a second time, knowest thou how He did it? Through the law. So if we guard and watch this law, and let it expand by itself, swelling like an ear of corn, a thousand times into a thousandfold blessings, what is our object? Redemption, the hope which lives in all of us. Only we do not noise it abroad in the gutter and on the housetops.

PEOPLE

[*Murmuring.*] There he is right. Aye, he is right!

SCENE IX

The same. A troop of pilgrims have come up by degrees and slake their thirst at the fountain. Among them Simon the Galilean.

AMASAI

See! Look around thee. Behold these pilgrims! They come with their knapsacks from far distant lands: from Egypt, from Euphrates, and Syria, and from the accursed city of Rome itself. They are indifferent to hunger and thirst, the heat of the sun, and the dust of the road. And wherefore have they come? Because of this very law, which I and my brethren guard and study. And if thou sayest thou hast nothing to do with this law, and hatest it, tell us, then, what law thou lovest? Where do the Commandments leave off which the Lord made for His people, and where begin the vain works of men? Enlighten us, great prophet, and scold us not.

JOHN

[Is silent, and uncertain what to say.]

JOSAPHAT

I warned thee, Rabbi!

AMASAI

[With a laugh of scorn.] Now see, all of you. See! Methinks the great---- *[Breaks off as a woman, sickly and heavily loaded, comes accidentally near to him. He turns round in anger.]* Touch me not, lest I become unclean! I am a Rechabite!

SIMON THE GALILEAN

[To the woman.] No; touch *him* not, lest *thou* becomest unclean.

AMASAI

What?

SIMON THE GALILEAN

For the Pharisees who call themselves Rechabites are unclean from within. Come! *[Leads her to the fountain.]*

AMASAI

He denies God!

THE PEOPLE

[Murmuring.] He denies God!

AMASAI

A Rechabite unclean? A man who doth nothing day and night but fulfil the law; who performeth his sacred ablutions three times more than necessary; who sitteth, on the Sabbath, like a monument; who speaketh a blessing at meat twice, and over salt, bread er----er--*[half choking.]* A Rechabite unclean?

JOHN

If I could not answer thy questions with their double meaning, thou thyself hast now answered them!

AMASAI

And may seven swine possess thee, thou great prophet, so that compared with them thou appearest to me a saint. [*To the Galilean.*] And what evil spirit hath taken possession of thee, man? Art thou a Jew? Where dost thou come from? What is thy name?

MATTHIAS

[*In a low voice.*] Tell him not thy name. He will ruin thee.

SIMON THE GALILEAN

[*Calmly.*] I am a Jew. My name is Simon, and I come from Galilee.

AMASAI

And as one that there knoweth Law and Sacrifice----

SIMON THE GALILEAN

[*Interrupting.*] Greater than law, greater than sacrifice, is love! [*Sensation and dismay among people*]

AMASAI

See ye not now that he is guilty against the law? [*He continues speaking earnestly to the people*]

JOHN

[*Approaching the Galilean in great excitement.*] Who taught thee that? [*As Simon is silent, more urgently.*] Who taught thee that?

MATTHIAS

[*In a quick, low tone to the Galilean.*] Before they capture thee, fly!

SIMON THE GALILEAN [*Shakes his head.*]

JOHN

This knowledge, that comes straight from thy simple and timid heart, awes me, for it cannot be thine own. [*The people, hounded on by Amasai, jostle the Galilean*] Back! In the Name of Him Who cometh, keep back. Leave him alone! [*People retreat.*]

PASUR

Thou playest with us and our great longing as if we were toys.

AMASAI

Ah, now I have caught thee! Thou who poisonest a thirsty people with foul water! Where is He Who shall come? Where is thy Messiah? Where is the King of the Jews? Aye, show Him to us!

THE PEOPLE

[*Fiercely.*] Yea, woe to thee if thou canst not show Him to us!

JOHN

[*Firmly.*] Here cometh the King of the Jews whom ye acclaim!

SCENE X

The same. Herod, Herodias, Salome and their train appear above in the background. The company of soldiers, with their officers, have posted themselves at the Palace gates. In silence the procession descends.

ONE OF THE TRAIN

Hail to Herod! [*Still silence.*] Now, ye dogs! Cry, Hail!

HEROD

At what are the people gaping? [*To the Commander of the Guard.*] Ye, who in obedience to Rome's command are here to protect me, cannot you clear them out of my way?

THE SOLDIERS

[*At a sign from their Captain begin to charge the people with lowered spears.*]

AMASAI

[*Who is standing in the foremost row. Turns with a shrill cry.*] Woe! woe! [*Takes flight.*]

[*Jorab follows him. The people retreat with a subdued exclamation of fear. John alone stands his ground, his head held high, and measures Herod with his glance.*]

SALOME

[*Raising her veil.*] Mother, look at that man. It is the same who stood in the market-place and at the gates and everywhere where we have passed.

HEROD

And everywhere caused dissension.

SALOME

Look! His eyes flash fire! Mother, look!

HEROD

Come along, ye women. And if the pious citizens of Jerusalem have unlearned the way to welcome with rejoicing the representative of the great race of Herod [*with a glance at the Captain of the Guard*], Rome, I hope, will teach it to them again. [*The Captain shrugs his shoulders with a slight smile.*]

HEROD

Come, I pray. [*Herod, Herodias, Salome, go with their train into the Palace; the common*

soldiers into the guard-room.]

SCENE XII

Johannes, Josaphat, Matthias, Manassa, Hachmoni, Pasur, the people.

HACHMONI

[At the head of a group, pressing forward] Pardon us, great prophet. The Pharisees have fled like cowards. But, see, we cling to thee. So now help us.

THE PEOPLE

Help us!

JOHN

[As if in a dream.] Tell me, whither hath the man from Galilee gone?

MANASSA

Rabbi, we know not.

JOHN

Then seek him. Bring him to me.

MANASSA

Yes, Rabbi.

ALL THE PEOPLE

Tarry with us, great prophet. Help us! We flee to thee.

JOHN

[Pondering in uncertainty.] Matthias, Josaphat, did he not say Love? *[The curtain falls].*

SECOND ACT

SECOND ACT

Hall in Roman style of architecture in Herod 's Palace--On the right side, a balcony upheld by pillars, which extends the whole depth of the stage, and to which a flight of steps leads--Off the balcony a door opens into Salome's room--Underneath, on the ground floor, another door--In the centre of the background is the chief entrance--On the left, a window--Near it a couch and other furniture--To the right, between the pillars of the balcony, is a divan--Carpets and tiger-skins on the floor--A mixture of Roman and Oriental luxury.

SCENE I

Maecha, Miriam, Abi [on the balcony]. After them, Salome.

THE DAMSELS

[Stepping cautiously and listening.]

SALOME

[Through the door.] Is it safe? No one there?

MAECHA

Not a sound of anyone.

SALOME

Then, come! *[They skip down the stairs.]*

SALOME

Ah, here it is light, and one can see oneself reflected in the walls. Do you know why we have been suddenly mewed up in the apartments above? Yesterday we were allowed to wander as we listed through all the passages, to dance unveiled in the gardens, and peep through the railings and mock the passers-by. But to-day, since my uncle came, we have had to sit moping in sackcloth and ashes. Why? Do none of you know why?

MAECHA

Mistress, the house is now filled with strangers who were not here yesterday. And, it is said that the men who are in the Tetrarch's following run after young maidens.

SALOME

Let them! I am not afraid of any men.... I take them as I find them.... I love them.

ABI

Thou knowest men, mistress?

SALOME

I mean not the men of our own people! They wear beards on their chins like forests, and before one can look round, they stand there barefooted, and then people say---- No; I dislike that. But once, when I was with my father in Antioch, I met pale youths with golden brown hair, and they wore red shoes and smelt of perfumes.... They were Greeks, my father said, real Greeks from Hellas.... They smiled, and it made me thrill.... Why dost thou stand there sulking, Miriam, and listenest not to my converse? It doth not please thee? Laugh, or I'll beat thee. If thou

laughest not, I'll have thee whipped!

MIRIAM

Let me be whipped, mistress.

SALOME

Where wert thou last night? The palace guards said thou wouldst visit thy sweetheart.... Thou hast a lover? [*Roguishly.*] Whisper his name in my ear and I'll give thee a gold pin.

MIRIAM

I have no one that loveth me, mistress.

SALOME

The language of you Judeans hath an insipid flavour, and your eyes dissemble. Yet, I love Jerusalem. A purple haze hangs over its gables. And it seemeth to me ever as if the sun in Jerusalem kissed one secretly. But ye could not understand how that is ... ye have not the blood of the great Herod in your veins. My mother hath it, and I have it from her.... And whatever they may say in Jerusalem, my mother was wise to run away from that other husband, for the one here is of more account than he. And because she was so wise, and at the same time so sadly foolish, I love her, and will share the consequences of her folly. [*She flings herself on the couch.*] I am not displeasing to my uncle Herod.... I have remarked that he casts stolen glances at me.... Now when my mother scolds me I shall know how to tease her! [*Trills forth.*] I am the Rose of Sharon, a flower of the valley. Cometh not my friend into his garden to eat of--- Miriam, where does that window look out?

MIRIAM

I do not know, mistress. I have never been in this hall before.

SALOME

Go and see.

MIRIAM

[*Looks out of the window and starts.*]

SALOME

Why dost thou start?

MIRIAM

Did I, mistress?

SALOME

Tell me what thou seest?

MIRIAM

There are many people standing round a fountain, and---

SALOME

And?

MIRIAM

I cannot----

SALOME

[*Stands up and goes to window.*] Ah! [*Looking out for a moment in silence.*] Miriam, who is that?

MIRIAM

[*Confused.*] Whom dost thou mean, mistress?

SALOME

Is there anyone else but him?... Miriam, thou gentle, brown Miriam [*half threateningly*], deny him not!

MIRIAM

It is--John--the Baptist.

ABI, MAECHA

[*Hurrying up, all curiosity.*] The Baptist?

SALOME

Let him be who he be. See how the people surge round him! Have ye ever in your valley seen a rock bend? He doth not bend. Ha! ha! Not he! Only if--perhaps---- [*She stretches out her arms.*]

SCENE II

The same. Herodias. [Enters from centre.]

MAECHA

Mistress, thy mother!

THE THREE MAIDENS

[*Withdraw quickly from the window.*]

HERODIAS

What are ye doing here, damsels? Salome thou! Shall we let it be said that we have brought evil manners into Jerusalem?

SALOME

[*Intending to wound, but outwardly meek.*] Methinks it is said already.

HERODIAS

[*Enraged.*] Go!

SALOME

Yes, mother. [*She crosses over, and lingers between the pillars of the balcony.*]

HERODIAS

Ye damsels, stay! Ye are Judeans?

MAECHA

Yes, mistress.

HERODIAS

Intelligence hath reached me of one they call the Baptist stirring up rebellion in the streets. Which of you know the man?

MAECHA

She does.

ABI

She hath this moment confessed it.

HERODIAS

What dost thou know of him?

MIRIAM

That last night I sat at his feet praying.

SALOME

[*Coming forward*] Thou? Thou?

MAECHA

Pardon! A moment ago he was standing close to the Palace.

HERODIAS

Show him to me.

MAECHA

[*From the window*] Now is he gone.

HERODIAS

[*To Miriam*] So speed after him, and when thou hast found him, bring him privately through yonder gate. [*Points below to the right*]

SALOME

She shall not.... I will not ... *Not* her!

HERODIAS

Why not?

SALOME

[*Throwing her arms round Miriam*] She is dearest to me. I will not let her go out of my sight. [*Comes over and supplicates Herodias*] Mother!

HERODIAS

Art thou still such a child? [*To Miriam.*] Go!

SALOME

[*Angrily.*] Miriam!

[*Exit Miriam.*]

HERODIAS

Such a child, and already hast the tooth of a serpent in thy mouth!

SALOME

[*Kneels on the couch before her mother and encircles her knees with her arms.*] Forgive me, mother. We, thou and I, are not like others. We sting those we love.

HERODIAS

[*Sotto voce.*] And those we hate?

SALOME

[*Sotto voce.*] We kiss!

HERODIAS

[*Laughing.*] Child! [*She kisses her.*]

SALOME

[*Laughing.*] Thou kissest me!

SCENE III

The same. The Palace Captain.

PALACE CAPTAIN

My master, the Tetrarch Herod, would see thee, mistress.

HERODIAS

[In growing anxiety covers Salomes' face with her veil.] Go, make haste; go!

SALOME

Mother, I am dull in the upstairs chambers. May I not stay near thee?

HERODIAS

[Looking towards the door.] Go, instantly!

SALOME

[Slowly climbs the stairs with her companions.]

HERODIAS

Thou art Captain in the Palace?

THE PALACE CAPTAIN

[Bows.]

HERODIAS

Go, set watches at every door. Who entereth goeth not out again.... And keep silent.

THE PALACE CAPTAIN

One has but to see thee to know that thou art the mistress.... How should I not be silent? *[Goes to the door.]*

SCENE IV

The same. Herod, Gabalos, Merokles, Jabad. The Palace Captain [exit when the others enter].

HEROD

Princess, after waiting even the space of a moment, a man will enjoy his favours to the full.... Therefore ... *[Kisses her on brow and mouth.]* Pardon!

HERODIAS

Thou hast rested; art refreshed?

HEROD

That question thou oughtst not to ask me. My father was one of those men who never knew what weariness was. So his son, likewise, parts company with his pillow betimes, and---- [*He observes Salome who, with her veil slightly lifted, looks down from the balcony, and after she sees that he has noticed her, vanishes.*]

HERODIAS

Thou art silent.

HEROD

Thy daughter is not with thee?

HERODIAS

[*Dryly.*] No.

HEROD

[*Bows his head, smiling.*] Allow me, Princess ... to present these friends.... I will not call them servants, for such they are not.

MEROKLES

Oh, mistress, they are servants whom thou mayest safely make thy friends.

JABAD

And they are friends in order that they may serve thee.

GABALOS

And are amply rewarded for both, great mistress.

HEROD

[*Smiling.*] This rascal, whose Syrian dialect thou art now acquainted with for the first time, is Gabalos from Antioch. Thou seest, I tolerate his jesting.

GABALOS

For Herod the Great also kept a Fool.

HERODIAS

And people say that he acquired a second Fool before he let the first drown.

GABALOS

[*Bows, smiling, then turns aside with a grimace.*]

HEROD

This is Merokles, the rhetorician. His voice carries far. It is heard in Rome, when folks there would overhear my own.

MEROKLES

But I shall take no satisfaction in that voice till it may greet thee, mistress, with the cry "Hail to thee, O Queen!"

HERODIAS

[Winces, then smiles and exchanges a glance with Herod.]

MEROKLES

[Sotto voce, joining Gabalos.] Thou madest a good hit; I a better.

HEROD

And in contrast to this cool flatterer, here is Jabad the Levite, my guide and my conscience ever since I set foot on Jewish soil. For, by Bacchus, he knows exactly what I have to do, every moment, in order to be pious, after the manner of my pious people.

GABALOS

[Sotto voce.] He acts as if he had forgotten the way.

MEROKLES

[Sotto voce.] For by so doing he thinks he will the more resemble his father.

HEROD

As an example, what ought I to be doing at this sacred moment?

JABAD

The sun is sinking, oh master. Thy Passover lamb, one year old and flawless, hath been slaughtered in the Temple. It is now in the yard to be blessed. Thou, as the lord and master of this house----

HEROD

Must do it myself?

JABAD

Thine illustrious father did not, and there was, on that account, grumbling amongst the people.

HEROD

Blessing is cleaner work than slaughter. I will do it. See, ye wise Greeks, that we must serve the gods in order to rule over men! And in the end we serve to no purpose. *[He motions them*

away. *To Jabad.*] Go and make ready, and I will follow thee. [*Exeunt Gabalos, Merokles, and Jabad.*]

SCENE V

Herod, Herodias [later Salome with Maecha, on the balcony. Herod and Herodias stand together a few moments in silence.]

HERODIAS

Art thou content?

HEROD

Thy kindness oppresses me. Whether thou art content seemeth to me of more importance.

HERODIAS

[Feeling his tone of contempt.] I have had no roof over my head for three nights. Like a tramp I have wandered in the dust of the roads. My serving-women one by one deserted me. Only Salome hath not forsaken me. I have robbed her of her father; the father I have robbed of his child. And what I have robbed my husband of thou canst estimate better than it beseemeth me. See, all this I have done for thee!

HEROD

I have abandoned my wife, who also said she loved me. She flew to her father. He now maketh ready for war to avenge his child's wrong. Only a trifle is lacking: I have no army. In Rome I am threatened with disgrace; my brother curses me; Judea points the finger of scorn at me.... So little have I done for thee----

HERODIAS

And thou repentest this little already?

HEROD

No! only forgive me if I blame thy coming too soon.

HERODIAS

Too soon! Was warmer welcome ever heard than this "too soon"?

HEROD

Take not my words amiss, I entreat thee!

HERODIAS

I dare not say that longing drove me here.

HEROD

[With an embarrassed smile.] Say it ... by all means!

HERODIAS

Then thou hast not forgotten the days--of eloquent looks and silent vows--when every breath was a longing desire and every word a feast?

HEROD

How should I forget? Love, how should I----?

HERODIAS

And thou rememberest no more the nights when wandering footsteps stole their way to the fragrant gardens, where, in the feverish blossoming around them, two sleepless ones mingled their sighs?

HEROD

How could I not remember; Love, how could I not?

HERODIAS

I have clothed myself in Indian draperies; I have put pomegranate blossoms in my bosom, and gold dust in my hair ... but thou seest nothing!... My converse is bridal, but thou hearest it not.

[Salome has appeared on the balcony with Maecha. Herod notices her.]

SALOME

Wait; let me see whether he has already come. *[She looks over, and after her eyes have met Herod's she vanishes.]*

HERODIAS

[Observing his absence of mind, with an exclamation.] No! thou hearest nothing.

HEROD

[Quickly recovering himself?] Well; what if it is so? The language of our soul, which thou art kind enough to call bridal, was fitting to the delight of those fragrant gardens. To-day, methinks, we have another task before us!

HERODIAS

Thinkest thou that I have been idle? Am I a woman who cometh to beg of you a nightly dole of caresses? Look at me.... Not thy beloved.... She exists no longer.... See in me thy ruling mistress!

HEROD

I am looking, and I see a woman who raves.

HERODIAS

As real as the ambition of thy mistress, as real as the secret resentment which gnaws beneath thy own; despite thy ever-ready smiles.

HEROD

[*Horrified.*] Who told thee ... whence ...?

HERODIAS

So real and positive is my hold over thee. Just now, when thou didst say I raved, thou wast reflecting how thou couldst best get rid of me.... Thou fool; then get rid of thy wakeful nights and all that which thou thinkest great in thyself, the inheritance of that greater than thou, whom thou wilt never equal....

HEROD

Woman ... what ... [*his words choke in his throat.*]

HERODIAS

[*Laughing.*] Speak out what thou hast to say. If thou no longer needest me for love, thou mayest still require me as a listener and adviser.

HEROD

[*After he has walked up and down several times in great excitement.*] Never resemble.... What is the man who smiles amiably in wrath? A coward?... What is the man, who has two faces? Insincere?... Who fawns on those in power. Servile? No; because the great Herod also did these things. But sometimes, when the blood throbbed to bursting in his veins, he snatched his sword from the sheath and slashed at friend and enemy alike who stood in his way ... till the blood of his victim washed him calm and cool again ... till the mighty at Rome experienced a thrill at such a display of strength.... I, too, feel the blood hammering in my veins.... I, too, would ... but I have no sword ... and so I must continue to smile amiably ... continue showing two faces, and licking the sandals of the priests.... I, the son of Herod; I, his ape!

HERODIAS

And suppose that the priests of the Temple adopted the attitude of shield and barrier betwixt thee and the fury of the people, wouldst thou doubt thyself less?

HEROD

I doubt myself not. And what thou sayest can never happen.

HERODIAS

[*Goes to the middle door and opens it.*]

[*A Porteress enters.*]

HERODIAS

What tidings hast thou?

THE PORTERESS

The two messengers to the Temple, mistress, have come back with word from the High Priest.

HERODIAS

Show them into the outer hall.... They shall wait there.

[*Exit the Porteress.*]

HEROD

[*With a laugh of rage and fear.*] Are their trumpets already sounding on the road? Hath the great curse already reached the door?

HERODIAS

Thou art wrong, my friend. Only a little blessing scratches at the door.... If it pleaseth thee, let it come in.

HEROD

Thou dreamest.

HERODIAS

Listen to me! Why did I come before thee in haste to inhabit this empty house?... Because every hour since I came I have been negotiating with the priests----

HEROD

Thou?

HERODIAS

What if instead of hiding the sinning woman from the people, thou, with head held aloft, repairest with her to the Temple? Would it not be an ironical event if the High Priest, with the same air of patriarchal servility with which he greeted the virtuous Mariamne, also smiled a welcome to thy brother's runaway wife?

HEROD

With what sum hast thou purchased this?

HERODIAS

When it is given, it will be a present, not a purchase.

HEROD

Only one who knows not these butchers of the High Altar could believe you.

HERODIAS

Well, these are the terms [*in a low voice*]. If we were to promise never again to aspire in Rome to the sceptre of Judea [*scoffingly*], then they might consider----

HEROD

And what answer didst thou make to such drastic, such----

HERODIAS

I promised.... What else should I do?... for thee, as well as myself.

HEROD

[*Pointing to himself.*] Even before this booty was thine, thou hast betrayed it?

HERODIAS

I fancied that I heard thee crying out just now for a sword. [*Smiling.*] When thou art king, thou wilt, of course, kill all whom thou hast promised not to be king! That is the same thing as if thou hadst never promised it.

HEROD

[*Staring at her.*] Woman!

HERODIAS

Believest thou still that I hurried here only for the sake of a kiss?

HEROD

I shudder at thee. But even if the priests be won over, there remains the people, the hydra-headed; thou knowest not the people. They once, it is said, hurled sacrificial victims at the head of their king, they slew Barachia's son between the Temple and the altar. And besides, dost thou not know that John the Baptist is in the town?

HERODIAS

The Baptist! Leave the Baptist to me.

HEROD

I warn thee, approach him only with a weapon in thy hand!

HERODIAS

[*Laughs.*]

SCENE VI

The same. Jabad and several servants.

JABAD

Pardon, oh master, the lamb is ready.

HEROD

First, we will hear what the priests have to say if your mistress, *our* mistress, so pleaseth.

HERODIAS

[Assents, smiling.]

[Exeunt all.]

SCENE VII

John, Miriam [come through the lower door to right].

MIRIAM

Await her here, Rabbi.... What are thy commands to thy handmaiden?

JOHN

[Shakes his head.]

MIRIAM

[Kisses the hem of his garment.]

[Exit.]

SCENE VIII

John [left alone for a brief space], then Salome, and two of her damsels.

SALOME

[Steps softly to the balustrade and gazes down on John, seeks in her breast for a flower, and not finding one turns back to Maecha.] Give me those thou wearest in thy girdle. [She takes the roses which Maecha hands to her and throws them down.] He doth not see them. Bring more flowers, and thy harp. Stay, Maecha, or I shall be afraid. [Exeunt the maids, except Maecha.] Thou fair savage, out of the wilderness of Judah! The fire of hate that flashes from thy eye shall not devour me! I will kindle another fire in it, lovely and languid like my dreams, when at night the perfume of the narcissi is wafted to my pillow. [The maids come back.] Give them here.... Roses ... two arms' full. [Hides her face in the flowers.] Now if I had narcissi, too! Nay, but tarry and sing the song which I taught you yesterday, the song which the dancers sang at Antioch. But sing softly, so that he be not shy of us. Where is Miriam?

ABI

She refuseth to come.

SALOME

[Between her teeth.] She refuseth! He saw the rose. He is picking it up ... as if he had never--- There are more ... and more ... and more. [She scatters the roses down on him.]

SONG OF THE MAIDENS

[The following is accompanied by the harp, which, after playing a finale alone, dies away.]

I have entertained thee with myrrh and honey.
I bound sweet sandals on my feet.
From my waist I have loosened the girdle,
I have sung with the harp, thee to greet.
Now come, let us quench

The fire that consumes me ... Come!
Or thou from fear shalt blench.
For my soul will hate thee ... Come!

JOHN

[*Has looked up astonished. The hail of flowers strikes him in the face. He shrinks back.*] Who playeth with me?

SALOME

[*Who has slowly descended the steps.*] Master, I---

JOHN

Who art thou?

SALOME

[*Coyly trifling.*] I am a rose of Sharon and a flower of the valley.

JOHN

Then play with thy mates ... Leave me in peace ... or go and call her who summoned me.

SALOME

My mother?

JOHN

Thou art Salome the---

SALOME

Yes; I am she.

JOHN

Let me look into thy eyes, maiden.

SALOME

Look, master ... No, but not like that.... If you compellest me to put my hands before my face, I shall spread my fingers apart and laugh between them; yes, I shall laugh.

JOHN

Maiden, knowst thou not how abhorred this house is? Keepest thou thy soul innocent among the guilty?

SALOME

Look at me again, master.... Am I not young among the Daughters of Israel? And I have heard say that youth knoweth nothing of the guilty and of guilt. See, they keep me confined to the

upper chambers. I drew back the bolts and crept out here, because I knew thou wert here, master.

JOHN

How can I say to the storm wind: "Pass by," and to the floods, "Swallow her not"?

SALOME

Speak on, master, even if I understand nothing thou sayest. And knowest thou that we are now sinning according to the Jewish "law"? Both of us--yea, it is true. My companions are gone; and is it not forbidden for a Jewish man to be alone with a virgin?

JOHN

I am not alone with thee. Behind us standeth the shadow of those who have dragged thee with them through the foul refuse of their pleasures.

SALOME

I have my own pleasures, master. How shall the pleasures of others concern me? I read once a saying that stolen fruits are sweet, and my nurse used to tell me that undiscovered treasure was only found by those who did not seek for it.... Is it not true thou hast not sought me?

JOHN

Thy converse is confused.

SALOME

No matter. Chide me not. Think, are not our *dreams* confused too? When I flew hither with my mother, we came at night to a field of poppies. And the dew shone on their petals.... They looked grey, and were all closed up because it was night.... But now they are wide open, and I think my cheeks must glow red in their reflection.

JOHN

Thou art lovely among the daughters of Jerusalem. They will weep for thee.

SALOME

Why will they weep? Am I to be sacrificed? Not I, master. Protect me! I have heard of a king, master, who made a compact with the sun. Hast thou heard of him? [*John bows his head.*]

SALOME

Well, I will make a compact with thee. Shall I be the sun, and thou my king? Or wilt thou be the sun, and I thy queen?

JOHN

Maiden, I cannot be either sun or king.

SALOME

Why not? It is only a game.

JOHN

A King cometh after me, but I wander in the wilderness and seek a path among thorns.

SALOME

And hast not found it?

JOHN

Not for myself.

SALOME

But for others?

JOHN

[In torture, half to himself.] Who knoweth?

SALOME

Master, what harm shall wrath do one, who is a jubilation and a feast day? And if thou camest to me in flames of fire, I would not mourn my youth for the length of two moons.... I would stretch out my arms and cry, "Destroy me, flame; take me up!"

JOHN

[After a pause.] Go!

SALOME

I am going. *[She rushes into the arms of Herodias, who enters.]* Mother!

SCENE IX

The same. Herodias and her women.

SALOME

Forgive me, mother, and let me stay with thee.

HERODIAS

Thou who lookest at me so imperiously, art thou the man who stirreth up the people against me?

JOHN

I am he whom thou hast summoned.

HERODIAS

[*Seating herself.*] Come hither to me!

JOHN

Send thy women away, and this child, so that she be not corrupted ere she is ripe.

HERODIAS

But this child, companion of my fate, shall hear what thou hast to say to me.

JOHN

She should be guarded from what I have to say to thee.

HERODIAS

Take care, prophet! At that door stand armed men, two deep. Consider thy danger, so that thou courtest not death!

JOHN

I am a servant of life, and danger never standeth in my way.

HERODIAS

I respect thy faith, prophet, and so would speak to thee in a friendly spirit.... People have told me of a man who keeps far away from human dwellings, and only descends now and then to the banks of fresh waters to bless, so it is said. That pleased me well.... The great willingly bow to greatness ... and so I bow to thee.

SALOME

[*After cowering at her feet, springs up, and throws herself on her neck.*]

HERODIAS

I will not reproach thee for denouncing me in the market-place of Jerusalem, for thou dost not know me.... Yet I was *not* well pleased that thou didst chew the cud of wormwood, which hath embittered these Judean cattle against me. I should have thought thou wast too proud, thy solitary nature too noble!

JOHN

I have not come here for thy praise or thy blame. I have but a simple question to ask. Art thou going on the first day of the Passover to the Temple, at the Tetrarch's side?

HERODIAS

[*Mastering her scorn with difficulty.*] I perceive, thou great prophet, that thy wrath strains on its chain.... Before thou lettest it loose, permit me also to ask a question; for see, I am endeavouring to approach thee, and would gladly win thee. Wert thou not a riddle to me, I should not ask it. Yet truly no man is so curiously fashioned as not to cherish secret wishes in his heart. Every one hath said to himself: "This were my delight, and that my desire."

JOHN

I understand thee not.

HERODIAS

Look round thee. Doth not the gleaming snow of marble attract thy eyes, nor the yellow glitter of gold?

JOHN

[Is silent.]

HERODIAS

Or ... hast thou never dreamed of the power and splendour and riches of this world?

JOHN

[Still silent.]

Or *[pointing to Salome, who again cowers at her feet.]* has thy heart not trembled at the sight of this sweet, unveiled youth?

JOHN

[After further silence.] Thou wouldst sell thyself to me! Dost thou know thy own price? A grain of barley would be too dear ... for thy name is courtesan, and adulteress is written on thy brow.

HERODIAS

[Infuriated.] Thou--thou---

SALOME

[Falling into her arms.] Mother!

HERODIAS

[Controlling herself haughtily and contemptuously.] I should have thee seized on the instant, only thou makest sport for me. And if not quite intoxicated with thy own superiority, listen to me once more. He who thinketh himself designed to be a judge over men should take part in the life of men, should be human among human beings.

JOHN

[Impressed.] What ... didst thou say?

HERODIAS

But thou seemest to me so isolated from thy fellow-men that the throb of a human heart itself is nothing to thee.... Thou hast avoided, cowardlike, all contact with sin and guilt in thy waste places, and now creepst forth to condemn others as guilty. The scorching winds of thy desert may perhaps have taught thee hate ... but what knowest thou of love? of those who live and die for the sake of their love?

JOHN

Thou too speakest of love ... thou too?

HERODIAS

See! I am laughing at thee, great prophet. [*She laughs.*]

SALOME

Mother, look at him ... be silent!

JOHN

Thy poisoned arrows are well aimed, and hit their mark! But ... [*pointing to the window*] see there, the Lord's people ... they gnash their teeth against thee, for thou hast taken their bitter bread out of their mouths and dissipated their miserable joys.... Thou sayest that I know them not.... Yet I know their heart's desire ... for I have created it; I have put my life at the service of that desire, and I cry to thee, "Woe! thou that hast contaminated it for them.... Thou enervatest the strength of their young men, and exposest the shame of their young women. Thou sowest scoffings where I thought to reap faith.... And if thou bendest the High and Mighty to be the footstool of thy lusts, I will fling the poor and humble in thy path, that they may trample thee beneath their feet.... Woe to thee, and woe to him who shareth thy adulterous couch!... Woe, too, to this youthful body that cringes under the scourge of thy blood! Woe! Woe!"

HERODIAS

[*Springing up and going to the door on right.*] The guards shall seize him.... Guards!... [*She wrenches the door open.*]

SCENE X

The same. Two guards.

HERODIAS

Lead this man [*She hesitates as she meets John's eyes.*]

JOHN

[*Smiling.*] Now, look to it, what thou dost with me!

HERODIAS

Lead this man ... out ... into the street.... [*She staggers to the divan.*]

SALOME

Thou camest in flames of fire!...

JOHN

[*Walks to the door.*]

[*The Curtain falls.*]

THIRD ACT

THIRD ACT

A room in Josaphat's house. In the background a door, which leads into the street. Near it a barred window. On the left side is a door to another living room. A door also on the right. In the foreground to left a cobbler's tools. Towards centre, a table and two or three benches. To the right, a couch, a small table, and chair beside it. The room is poor, but not bare; lighted by two clay lamps.

SCENE I

JAEL [*With a child at her breast.*]

[Two other children and several women standing near door on left listening to a psalm sung by men's voices, which is heard in subdued strains coming through the door.]

THE BOY

What are they singing now, mother?

JAEL

[Pale and troubled.] They sing the great Hallelujah, my child.

THE BOY

Is the prophet singing with them, mother?

JAEL

That I cannot hear, my child. *[Two more women come through middle door.]*

FIRST WOMAN

Jael, we have heard that the Great Prophet eateth the passover in thy house. Wilt thou permit us to see him?

JAEL

Come in!

ONE OF THE OTHER WOMEN

That is he, the last there on the left.

FIRST WOMAN

He that sitteth there looking so heavy of spirit?

THE SECOND WOMAN

I should be frightened of him. [*The singing has meanwhile ceased.*]

FIRST WOMAN

They say that he hath come into the town to judge Herodias. Is that so, Jael?

JAEL

I know not.

THE BOY

Mother, see, they are now drinking the fourth goblet. They will be here directly.

FIRST WOMAN

Hath he spoken a blessing over the fourth goblet?

SECOND WOMAN

No; Josaphat spake it.

FIRST WOMAN

See, they are standing up!

ANOTHER

Are they coming hither, Jael?

JAEL

That is the couch on which he will rest.

SEVERAL

Then farewell, Jael.

JAEL

Farewell! [*They hurry out.*]

SCENE II

JOSAPHAT

Here thou wilt be alone, Rabbi. The others remain outside.

JOHN

Accept my thanks, Josaphat.

AMARJA

Mine, too, Josaphat.

JOSAPHAT

Thank him, Amarja, for eating with us. [*While John seats himself, he says, sotto voce, to Amarja*] Come! [*Observes Jael, who has been standing at the door unnoticed.*] Jael, thou here, and the children?

JOHN

Is that thy wife, Josaphat?

JOSAPHAT

Yes, Rabbi.

JOHN

And thy children?

JOSAPHAT

Yes, Rabbi.

JOHN

Thou hast never told me of these.... Is thy name Jael? He called thee so.

JAEL

Yes, Rabbi.

JOHN

Why comest thou not nearer?

THE BOY

We are afraid of thee, Rabbi.

JOHN

[*Smiling.*] Why are you afraid?

THE BOY

I do not know.

JOSAPHAT

Forgive him, Rabbi ... he ...

JOHN

Josaphat, wilt thou entrust them to me for a few minutes?

JOSAPHAT

[*Bows his head, signs to Amarja, and goes away with him to the right.*]

SCENE III

John, Jael, the children.

JOHN

Thy eyes have a sad look, Jael. Is thy heart troubled?

JAEL

Kneel down, Baruch, my son. Kneel down, both.

THE BOY

[*Half crying.*] Mother!

JOHN

What is it, Jael?

JAEL

[*To the children.*] Say: Prithee, Rabbi?

THE CHILDREN

Prithee, Rabbi.

JAEL

And this little one prayeth, too, though not old enough to pray....

JOHN

For what?

JAEL

That thou wouldest give them back their father; for see, they have no bread.

JOHN

[*Lifting the children from their knees.*] Just now we ate of the lamb in thy house, and thou sayest "we have no bread"?

JAEL

I do not speak of to-day; to-day the poorest have something to eat. Thou art truly a great prophet, Rabbi, and thou givest much to the people; but from us--from me and these little children--thou takest away all that we have.

JOHN

How could I do that, Jael?

JAEL

See; for a long time my husband goeth out every night to thee in the wilderness, and then the tools lie there idle, and we starve. But willingly would we starve and die of hunger for him, if thou hadst not estranged his heart from us, and stolen his love for thyself.

JOHN

Art thou, too, one of those who say, Greater than the law and sacrifice is love?

JAEL

[*Anxiously.*] I did not say that, Rabbi.... Thou wouldst not get me into trouble with the priests?

JOHN

But thou thinkst so in thy heart!

JAEL

Rabbi!

JOHN

Hadst thou come to me in my wilderness, I would have shown thee the way to One Who shall bring food to the hungry. Here, I am powerless. Go; I have nothing to do with thee!

JAEL

[*Goes with the children to the door.*]

JOHN

[*Makes a movement as if he would call her back.*]

JAEL

Rabbi!

JOHN

[Shakes his head.]

[Exit Jael, with the children.]

SCENE IV

John, Josaphat, Amarja.

JOHN

Josaphat, how long have I known thee?

JOSAPHAT

It is two years since I came to thy baptism.

JOHN

And since, thou hast been often?

JOSAPHAT

Have I not always been with thee, Rabbi?

JOHN

I never knew that thou wast a cobbler ... and that thy children cried for bread! It seems to me that I do not know thee even yet, Josaphat.

JOSAPHAT

Thou knowest what is best in me, for thou hast given it to me!

JOHN

So, then, I know myself alone. And of thee, too, Amarja, I know no more.... Only this I know.
[Gazing into vacancy.] I am sent--- *[Breaks off.]*

JOSAPHAT

Rabbi!

JOHN

Some one hath said to me that I knew ye not; one of those who have the word "love" on their

tongues.... And I am inclined to believe her.... But even if I have known you, I have not desired to love you, but rather to judge you in the name of---- In whose name? Know ye the rest?

JOSAPHAT

In the name of Him Who shall come. So thou hast taught us, master.

JOHN

Sooner would I talk to these black walls, that they might perhaps fall; sooner to thy hungry children, that my words might fill them. But the belief that looketh up to me, transfigured because it believeth.... That hurts me.

AMARJA

[*Low to Josaphat.*] It is now the second hour. Wilt thou not mention Herod to him?

JOHN

[*As Josaphat comes nearer to him.*] I sent the youngest of you to search for the Galilean. Where is he?

JOSAPHAT

He has not yet come back, master.

JOHN

May be he has lost the way.

JOSAPHAT

I told him where to come to, master.

JOHN

I want the Galilean.... Ye shall procure me the Galilean.... See ye not that my strength rests in my King ... Even if I serve Him like an unworthy vessel ... I serve Him according to my measure.... I have borne witness to Him.... Is that not true?

JOSAPHAT

Thou hast borne witness, indeed, Rabbi.

JOHN

But the testimony hath grown up in my soul. When He comes, will He bear it out?

JOSAPHAT

He will, master; for God sendeth Him.

JOHN

Else my soul hath not known Him, even as it hath not known you. Have ye no news of Manassa? Go and keep watch outside, that he doth not miss the house.

JOSAPHAT

That will be he! [*Goes to open the door.*]

SCENE V

The same. Matthias.

JOSAPHAT

Thou, Matthias? Hast thou not seen Manassa?

MATTHIAS

No. Rabbi, I come to thee in the night because of Herod.

JOHN

Because of Herod? [*Seats himself with head turned away.*]

MATTHIAS

I sent spies to the Palace up till the time of the Passover Feast. The priests were coming to and fro. What their business was no one knows. And if he cometh now to the morning sacrifice at eight of the clock, as is his custom on high festivals ... and comes with that woman ... flaunting his sin in the face of the people.... Rabbi, speak! What then?

JOHN

[*Does not answer,*]

AMARJA

He hears thee not.

JOSAPHAT.

He is thinking of the Galilean.

JOHN

I heard some one here speak of sin. Know ye in what raiment sin clothes itself gorgeously when it goeth abroad among the people? Say courtliness, say hate, say what ye will, and I shall laugh at you. Hear, and mark well. They call it love. Everything that is small, and stoops because it is small, that throws crumbs from its table in order not to throw bread; that covers up graves that they may stink secretly; that hews off the thumb of the left hand that it may have nothing to say to the thumb of the right; take care; all that is called love. And they call it love when in spring the ass brays and the dogs whine; when a woman herself gathers together the stones whereon to rest with her lover in the evening, stones which in the morning the people will hurl at her, and the woman speaketh: "See beloved, how sweet is our couch." ... They call this love.

MATTHIAS

[*After exchanging a look with Josaphat.*] Rabbi, forgive us, but the people are waiting for thee. The many who desert their beds, expectant of the morrow, think only of one thing--judgment! The

judgment of Herod.

JOHN

Judgment of Herod--well.

JOSAPHAT

And thou shalt judge him. No one else but thou?

JOHN

I shall judge him.

MATTHIAS.

Him and the woman?

JOHN

Him and the woman. Did ye doubt?

MATTHIAS

If we did, forgive.

AMARJA

But suppose he comes without the woman. What would happen then?

JOHN

Ye ask so much. Ye and your questions become wearisome. Hark! There is Manassa. [*Josaphat opens.*]

SCENE VI

The former. Miriam.

JOHN

Miriam, thou? What desirest thou of me?

MIRIAM

[*Breathless.*] I flew from the Palace.... The guards have chased me.... Perhaps what I know ... may be of use to thee.

JOSAPHAT

Speak, Miriam!

MIRIAM

If the master will hear. With ye others I have nothing to do.

JOHN

I will listen, Miriam.

MIRIAM

A rumour has reached the Tetrarch that the people are plotting evil against him. He would on that account hide the woman, but she will not be hid. She will defy the master, because he hath offended her. An order is just gone forth for all the servants of the house to arm themselves and line the road. Even during the night, so that the procession shall pass to the Temple ere the great crowd assembleth. Thus they think to escape the people's wrath and thine, master.

THE DISCIPLES

That shall not come to pass; verily it shall not.

JOSAPHAT

Hast thou learned, Miriam, by which of the outer gates they go to the Temple?

MIRIAM

By the Susan Gate. I heard the servants say, as I crept by.

JOSAPHAT

And will the Roman soldiers be amongst them?

MIRIAM

That I did not hear.

JOSAPHAT

For if the Romans accompany them, we must wait behind the second gate; there where no heathen may penetrate at the cost of his head.

MATTHIAS

On the other hand, they can there be saved by the priests.

JOSAPHAT

Certainly, there the priests---- Master, what is thy counsel?

JOHN

I counsel you to go forth into the streets, and to seek right and left. I would learn from that Galilean what counsel I ought to give you.

MATTHIAS

Canst thou understand him?

JOSAPHAT

I would liefer not understand him.

[Exeunt Josaphat, Matthias, and Amarja.]

SCENE VII

John, Miriam.

MIRIAM

[Shrinks against the wall near the door and looks shyly across at John, who broods with his back turned to her.]

JOHN

[Suddenly noticing her.] Thou, Miriam, art still here?

MIRIAM

Forgive me, master. I am a little afraid; for if I go homewards the guards at the gate will seize me.

JOHN

But thou camest to me in the wilderness at night?

MIRIAM

Then no one knew with whom I associated, master.

JOHN

Who art thou? Tell me about thyself. Who is thy father?

MIRIAM

I have no father--and no mother. The country is full of orphans like me. There are far too many. I have never asked anyone why.

JOHN

And why didst thou go to the Palace as serving maid?

MIRIAM

They say that I once sat and played with pebbles on the threshold. And when evening came, they took me in. Since then I have belonged to the Palace, and know no better.

JOHN

Thou servest me with zeal, Miriam. Why dost thou serve me?

MIRIAM

I know not why.

JOHN

And thou servest me to no purpose--knowest thou that?

MIRIAM

[*Bows her head.*]

JOHN

Will they not punish thee?

MIRIAM

[*With a shudder.*] They will ... I....

JOHN

Speak!

MIRIAM

Master, what does it matter?

JOHN

Miriam, is it also He Who shall come that thou servest?

MIRIAM

I cannot tell, master. When I see thee, I feel a longing for Him.... But if thou speakest to me of Him, I see only thee.

JOHN

Ye children of men ... there is a rushing as of many waters in your souls.... Clear and muddy ... I shall gather all together in one great river, and I feel as if I should drown therein.

MIRIAM

Master, now I must go. Whether or no I served thee to no purpose, be gracious. Praise me, master.

JOHN

I see thee sitting on the threshold again ... playing with thy life, and thou excitest my pity. ... Go, maid! Go, child! and [*He listens.*]

MIRIAM

Master!

SCENE VIII

The former. Josaphat, Matthias, Amarja, Manassa.

JOHN

[*Going forward to him.*] Where is the Galilean?

MANASSA

I have sought Him, master, from the hour thou sentest me till past midnight. I have not rested nor tasted a crumb.

JOHN

The Galilean? Hast thou found Him?

MANASSA

I found him. He lay stretched out on the stones in charge of the soldiers, and near him, in chains, was his murderer.

AMARJA

Who, on the holy eve of the Passover----?

MANASSA

They called him David the Zealot. The Galileans blaspheme God, he hath said, and therefore must this one die.

JOSAPHAT

It is true; he did blaspheme God.

MATTHIAS

He blasphemed God!

JOHN

But I say unto you ... To him it was not blasphemy. To him it was worship. Methinks more such men will come out of Galilee. For there is an uprising there.... Tell me, Josaphat, do not many pilgrims sleep on the stones at night, nigh the doors of the Temple?

JOSAPHAT

Yes, Rabbi. On starry nights, like these, many a one wraps himself in his blanket and tarries by the House of the Lord.

JOHN

[*In sudden decision.*] It is well.

[*Exit.*]

MATTHIAS

Rabbi!

AMARJA

Hath he deserted us?

JOSAPHAT

Be not troubled! Thou, Amarja, wake our friends. Thou, Manassa, bring us tidings from the Palace. We two will follow the master. Meet us at the Susan Gate, at the place where the old beggar-woman sits. Come! [*Exeunt the men.*]

MIRIAM

[*Who has stood unheeded, goes out with bowed head.*]

CHANGE OF SCENE

A stone square before the open gate of the Temple called the Susan Gate. The front of the stage is enclosed by the circuit of the outer wall. In the centre more than half the breadth of the stage is taken up by the massive doors of the gate, to which steps lead. It is night. The fire of the great sacrificial altar is reflected from the background on the walls, and fills the foreground with red, uncertain flickering glow.

SCENE X

Pilgrims (men and women) lie in their blankets, scattered about the steps and on the stones which fill the space on left side. Among them the First Galilean and Second Galilean. To the right of the path which leads outside the wall of the Temple, across the stage, lies Mesulemeth. (In a little while enter John from left.)

JOHN

[*Looks round searchingly, and pauses before a pilgrim who is sleeping on the steps.*] Pilgrim, awake!

PILGRIM

It is not yet day. Why dost thou wake me?

JOHN

Whence comest thou? Art thou a Galilean?

PILGRIM

I come from Gaza on the south-east coast. Let me sleep.

SECOND GALILEAN

[*To first.*] Didst hear? Some one there is talking of Galileans.

FIRST GALILEAN

Sleep, and let them talk.

JOHN

[*Walks on, and then pauses in front of Mesulemeth.*] Thou who liest here by the way, be thou man or woman, wake up!

MESULEMETH

Why dost thou not step over me, as every one does in Jerusalem?

JOHN

Dost thou lie here always in the road?

MESULEMETH

I lie here always. For I must be at the Temple. Day and night I must be at the Temple.

JOHN

Art thou not greedy for alms?

MESULEMETH

[*Shaking her head.*] The little I want, the pilgrims give me. But hast thou never heard of Hannah, the prophetess?

JOHN

I have heard speak of her, when I was a child.

MESULEMETH

Well, this is her place. Here she sat and waited for the Messiah, forty years long. When she died she left the place to me ... And now I sit and wait till He comes again.

JOHN

Comes again? Hath He then been already?

MESULEMETH

Certainly He hath.

JOHN

[*In deep emotion.*] He came? Came even to thee?

MESULEMETH

To me? No. If He had come to me, I should have been at rest long ago. But Hannah ... She saw Him when He came.

JOHN

Woman! I implore thee ... Speak, tell me, how did He come?

MESULEMETH

Then sit down here beside me, so that I may speak low.... Once a little lad was brought to the Temple by his mother, to be circumcised. And there was one called Simeon who, when he saw this boy-babe, was filled with the Holy Ghost, and said, "Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace, for his eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared for all nations." ... And Hannah heard this, and she came up to them and recognised Him?

JOHN

How did she recognise Him?

MESULEMETH

Did I not tell thee that she was a prophetess? Otherwise she might not have recognised Him. But as it was, she praised the Lord, and laid herself down and died. So now I sit where she sat, and wait for Him to come again.

JOHN

Verily, He must come again; and dost thou know, woman, how He will come? As the Lord of Hosts, arrayed in golden armour, with His sword drawn above His head, so He will come to save His people Israel. He will trample His enemies under His horse's hoofs, but the youth of Israel shall greet Him with hosannas and jubilation. See, woman, that is how He will come!

MESULEMETH

[*Anxiously.*] Who art thou, stranger? Dost thou imagine thyself to be the prophet of anyone?

JOHN

It matters not who I am, if thou art prepared for my message.

MESULEMETH

Thou canst take thy message further. I will not have it.

JOHN

What! Thou wilt not have the Messiah?

MESULEMETH

Not that one. I will not have that one. For many have come in golden armour, and have drawn their sword, and then Israel hath bled after, like a sacrificial ox. *He* shall be no king! No! When kings come, they come to kings! No one hath come, as yet to us, the poor---- Go away, stranger,

lest thou snatch from me my crumb of hope. Begone, thou art a false prophet!... Go, let me lie on the road! [*She sinks back.*]

JOHN

[*To himself.*] False prophet!

SCENE XI

The same. Josaphat, Matthias. [From the left.]

MATTHIAS

See, he is there!

JOSAPHAT

Rabbi, forgive us for following thee hither----

JOHN

It is not yet dawn.... At this hour ye have nothing to claim from me----

MATTHIAS

But, remember Herod----

JOHN

Why stir ye up so much dust? This puny Herod, who runs after women, is not my business.

JOSAPHAT AND MATTHIAS

[*Exchange dismayed glances.*]

JOHN

Go, find me Galileans! Wake those who sleep on the steps, ransack the houses if necessary. Only bring me Galileans, that I may question them.

SECOND GALILEAN

Hearst thou? Some one standeth there, clamouring for Galileans!

FIRST GALILEAN

I thought I dreamt it. Thou, who wilt not let us sleep, what dost thou want with us Galileans?

JOHN

Stand up and come to me!

SECOND GALILEAN

Goest thou?

FIRST GALILEAN

He must be great in Israel, otherwise he would not command.

SECOND GALILEAN

Yes, yes; thou art right. [*They both stand up.*]

JOSAPHAT

Rabbi---[*John signs to him with his hand to be silent.*]

FIRST GALILEAN

Now, here we are.

JOHN

Who are ye? Whence do ye come?

FIRST GALILEAN

We are fishermen from the Sea of Galilee. My name is Ram, and that is my brother-in-law, and he is called Abia. And we both fish with the same net. Is it not so?

SECOND GALILEAN

Yes; we both fish with the same net.

JOHN

And tell me, ye two men, have ye ever heard of a prophet that teacheth in Galilee?

FIRST GALILEAN

A prophet! Hast thou heard of a prophet, Abia?

SECOND GALILEAN

I have heard of no prophet.

JOHN

Not ... of one who saith ... He is the Son of God?

FIRST GALILEAN

Ah, thou meanest Jesus of Nazareth?

JOHN

[In great agitation, scarcely audible.] Jesus of Nazareth!

JOSAPHAT AND MATTHIAS.

[Awed.] Jesus of Nazareth!

JOHN

Thou spakest His name first. Fear sealed my lips. But now thou hast said it. Yes, I mean Him.

FIRST GALILEAN

Yes ... I know His father well. He is an honest carpenter, and very pious too. He well deserves that his son should be a joy to him.

JOHN

Tell me more of Him.

FIRST GALILEAN

He put up a bedstead for a friend of mine.

JOHN

Tell me of the son.

FIRST GALILEAN

Ah, the son. Well, Abia, what shall we say of the son?

SECOND GALILEAN

Aye, what shall we say of the son?

JOHN

Hast thou ever seen Him?

FIRST GALILEAN

Oh, yes.

JOHN

Thou hast seen Him?

FIRST GALILEAN

Many a time ... from my ship. For He carries on His work on the shore. And there is always a great gathering along the banks, is there not, Abia?

SECOND GALILEAN

Yes, the banks are always quite black with people. And the fish take notice of it. That is not good for our trade.

FIRST GALILEAN

They say that He works miracles. I once met a man myself who had been blind till his--I forget what year--and he maintained that he was made to see again by spittle from His mouth ... It may be possible--but---[*Laughs stupidly.*]

JOHN

[*To Josaphat.*] Have not many said of me, that I work miracles?

JOSAPHAT

Many say it, but we know it, Rabbi.

JOHN

Indeed? I have seen no miracle but the power ... and no one to whom it hath happened, save the weak. But speak on, man.

FIRST GALILEAN

It may be all very well for Him to heal the sick, but the worst of it is He doeth it on the Sabbath. That is bad, bad! And then, His friends are not well chosen. Circumspect people, naturally, are not disposed to mix with Him. For how can one trust a man who sitteth at meat with publicans and sinners? And, then, He is always at weddings and feasts. Ah! No, no.

JOHN

At feasts?

JOSAPHAT

Master, these are little people. They understand not the wisdom of cunning speech.

JOHN

The great should carry the little with them, the wise should master these simple intellects. That he hath not done.... And what is it He teacheth?

FIRST GALILEAN

Ah, what does He teach? All sorts of folly. For instance, that we should love our enemies.

JOHN

Love our enemies?

FIRST GALILEAN

And bless them that curse us ... and pray for them that persecute us.

JOHN

Pray for them that persecute us?

FIRST GALILEAN

Yes; and more nonsense of the kind. Also that---

CALL

[*From the roof of the Temple.*] It groweth light towards Hebron.

JOHN

[*Eagerly.*] Why dost thou not proceed?

FIRST GALILEAN

[*Rising.*] It is now time for morning prayer.

CALL

[*More distant.*] It groweth light towards Hebron. [*All stand up and begin to pray, their faces turned towards the Temple.*]

CALL

[*Quite distant.*] It groweth light towards Hebron.

JOHN

[*Baffled and tormented.*] Towards Hebron it groweth light.

SCENE XII

[*The great gates are slowly opened, displaying marble walls, mounting in terraces, behind which are two more gates. The Temple-building itself is almost completely hidden by smoke from the great lighted sacrificial altar, which bounds the perspective. From the mountains behind the Temple are heard the long-drawn notes of the silver trumpets. People begin to stream up.*]

MATTHIAS

[*Has gone to Josaphat's side and speaks to him privately, then turns to John, who stands alone on the left.*] Master, the people are flocking to the Temple.... In a few moments the Tetrarch will certainly be there too, with the woman. Wilt thou not step among them, that they may know their leader?

JOHN

The image of my King shining in the radiance of the cherubim. Where is it? Where is the rainbow of seven colours that was round His head? Seven torches burned by His throne. I see them no more!

SCENE XIII

MANASSA

[*Hurrying up from left.*] Matthias, Josaphat, where is the master?

JOSAPHAT

Herod has come forth from his door?

MANASSA

[*Assents.*]

JOSAPHAT

With the woman?

MANASSA

With the woman.

JOSAPHAT

Master [*as he heeds not*], Master----

JOHN

What is it?

JOSAPHAT

Herod is on the way.

JOHN

Who is Herod?

JOSAPHAT

[*Buries his face in his hands.*]

MATTHIAS

[*To Manassa.*] Had he the Roman soldiers with him?

MANASSA

Only his servants are with him.

MATTHIAS

Hearest thou, master? He is delivered into our hands.

SCENE XIV

The same. Amarja; with a fresh crowd of people.

AMARJA

[*Calling.*] John, where is John?

JOSAPHAT

[*With resolution.*] Here is John.

THE PEOPLE

[*Hear and murmur, joyously.*] See, there is John!

JOSAPHAT

Hear all of you! Go not past; and thou over there mayest speak. The master will listen unto thee.

AMARJA

Herod is coming to the Temple, wearing princely robes. At his side, sparkling with precious stones, walks the courtezan.

THE PEOPLE

[*Break out into cries of anger.*]

JOSAPHAT

Master, thy hour is come; mount the steps and speak to them!

THE PEOPLE

[*Pressing round.*] John, speak--Rabbi, speak--What shall we do?

JOSAPHAT

Keep back! He will speak to you. [*Sotto voce.*] Mount the steps!

JOHN

[*Walks as if in a dream towards the steps.*]

THE PEOPLE

[*Murmuring.*] See! He sways. What aileth him?

JOSAPHAT

Make haste. Speak!

CALL

Here is Herod. Here cometh Herod!

THE PEOPLE

Stone him! Stone the courtezan!

OTHERS

Look at John! Do what John does, else are ye lost.

SCENE XV

The same. Herod, Herodias, with train from right.

JOHN

[John has mounted the steps and stands in the middle of the threshold.]

HEROD

[Pale, but smiling.] Hearest thou what they cry?

HERODIAS

Have him seized, else it means death to you and to me.

THE PEOPLE

[Are silent and tense in expectation. Most of them have picked up stones.]

JOSAPHAT

[Who stands to the left of John on a lower step, hands him a stone, and says in a low voice.]
Take this stone! *[More urgently.]* Take this stone!

JOHN

[Takes the stone.]

HEROD

Thou on the steps. Knowest thou me not?

JOSAPHAT

[Whispers.] Hurl the stone!

JOHN

[*Firmly.*] In the name of Him [*He is about to throw the stone, then pauses, half-questioning, half-swooning.*] ... Who ... commands me ... to love thee---[*A low moaning runs through the people.*]

TWO SERVANTS

[*Have approached John. They seize him and push him down from the Temple steps.*]

HEROD AND HERODIAS

[*Walk up.*]

THE PEOPLE

Woe to us! He too hath forsaken us. Woe, woe!

JOSAPHAT

[*To John, who is pinioned by the servants.*] Master, what hast thou done to us?

THE PEOPLE

Woe! Woe!

[*The curtain falls.*]

FOURTH ACT

FOURTH ACT

A town in Galilee.... The stage represents a grass-grown prison-yard which, on the right side, is adjacent to the gardens of a Herodian Palace, divided from them by a low wall, which continues in a right-hand direction to the centre of background. On the left side of background a higher wall, and entrance with heavy doors. To the left, the clumsy pile of the prison buildings and a door. In the garden wall is a gate, over which hangs the green foliage of the garden beyond, which bounds the right side of background. On the right is a semi-circular shaped marble seat with back; on left, stones covered with moss.

SCENE I

Gaoler, Abi.

ABI

[*With head thrust over the garden wall.*] Master Gaoler, dost thou not hear?

GAOLER

What wilt thou?

ABI

A ball went over the wall. Hast thou seen it?

GAOLER

No.

ABI

Please look for it, and throw it back.

GAOLER

Look for it thyself.

ABI

How can I, unless thou openest the gate.

GAOLER

I may not open it. Let me be.

ABI

Listen, Gaoler. The ball belongs to Salome, our young Princess. If thou art not obliging, beware!

GAOLER

Oh, if it belongs to the young Princess---[*Opens the gate.*]

SCENE II

The Gaoler, Abi, Maecha, and later, Salome.

ABI

[*Calls back, laughing.*] Mistress, the door is open.

GAOLER

Is that the young Princess, who is daughter of his new wife?

ABI

[*Nods.*]

SALOME

[*Appears in the gateway.*]

GAOLER

Princess, if ever thou comest through again, be sure to laugh, as to-day. For this gate is full of danger for Herod's children.

SALOME

What does it do to Herod's children, thy gate?

GAOLER

The two sons of Herod the Great came through this gate before they were sentenced, and through this gate---

MAECHA

Stop!...

SALOME

Let him alone, Maecha! His wisdom has taken a holiday. Hast thou no livelier stories, old man?

GAOLER

What sort dost thou mean, young Princess?

SALOME

Stories of yesterday. Stories that have not yet come to an end--stories that are as young [*stretches herself*] as we are.

GAOLER

Ah, I knew; but---

SALOME

But? Tell me, hast thou a new prisoner?

GAOLER

Yes.

SALOME

What has he done?

GAOLER

[*Maliciously.*] He stole hens, young Princess.

SALOME

See to it that thou dost not steal my time!

ABI

[*Softly to him.*] With her there is no jesting.

GAOLER

Princess, forgive.... I did not know.... Thou meanest, perhaps, John?

SALOME

Which John?

GAOLER

The one they call the Baptist--the Prophet from Judea, who----

SALOME

So he is here?

GAOLER

Yes; he has been here the last three days, Princess. They brought him at the end of the same cavalcade which brought thee. He lieth now safe with the salamanders and scorpions. They say he stirred up rebellion in Jerusalem, and therefore----

SALOME

I wish to see John. Bring him here!

GAOLER

[*Horried.*] Princess, that cannot be.

SALOME

I wish it! Hast thou not heard? I wish it!

GAOLER

Princess, I opened this gate for thee because thou hadst lost a plaything. Shall I now, instead of thy plaything, lose this old head?

MAECHA

Mistress, the Tetrarch is coming.

SALOME

[*Veiling herself.*] Hide yourselves! [*She stoops behind the seat; the maidens slip into the bushes.*]

[*In the gateway Herod and his attendants.*]

SCENE III

The same. Herod, Merokles, Jabad, Gabalos.

HEROD

Gaoler!

GAOLER

Sire.

HEROD

Who are the three men who linger about the door? They look morose, and did not salute me.

GAOLER

Sire, those are the remnant of the crew which followed John, they say, from Jerusalem. For eight days and eight nights they followed him.

HEROD

The remnant, sayest thou? Where are the rest?

GAOLER

They lie somewhere by the wayside, Sire, and die of thirst, unless the ravens give them to drink.

HEROD

Drive them away!

GAOLER

Sire, we have hunted them off several times; but they always come back.

HEROD

So, let them be.

MEROKLES

See, how mild is our ruler! He doth not order them to be cut in pieces.

JABAD

Hail to our Ruler! [*The two others join in.*]

HEROD

To speak candidly, friends, I do not lay hands on sages and fools willingly; for one can never know whether the executioner holds up the head of a sage or a fool.

GABALOS

Thou canst do no wrong, Sire; for thou art wise, all-wise!

HEROD

When I order thee to be beheaded, I shall not be wrong; for thou art a fool, a complete fool. [*Nearing the seat.*] Bring me---[*Observes Salome, who, listening, has raised her head a little above the edge of the seat, then quickly dives down again.*] I beg you to retire, and await me without the gate.

[*Exeunt Gabalos, Merokles, Jabad.*]

SCENE IV

Herod, Salome. Also Abi and Maecha, hidden.

HEROD

Tell me, thou veiled one, art thou not Salome, my wife's daughter?

SALOME

Sire, so true as 'tis that thou art my protector I am Salome.

HEROD

How camest thou into this prison-yard?

SALOME

Ask me not, Sire. My soul else will blush before thee. It was curiosity, because I heard thee coming.

HEROD

And where are thy playmates?

SALOME

They are afraid of thee, so they have crept away. Abi, Maecha, come forth; our master commands it. [*Abi and Maecha come out hesitatingly, and curtsey profoundly.*]

HEROD

Thy eyes plead for them, therefore they shall not be scolded.

SALOME

And my lips thank thee on their behalf.

HEROD

They thank like conquerors. There is music in them. How is it, Salome, that I have never heard thy voice?

SALOME

Thou shouldst ask my mother, Sire.

HEROD

[*Fiercely.*] Thy mother! Still, I know that thou art well disposed towards me. Thou didst deliver into my hand that maid who carried on treason at night outside the Palace.

SALOME

Could I do less, Sire? And him to whom she betrayed thy secrets, wilt thou not punish him too?

HEROD

I do not know. But how?

SALOME

Sire, it seemeth to me that he hath a great following among the people. If thou sparest him, the people will like thee.

HEROD

Words of wisdom fall from thy lips, Salome.

SALOME

See how his disciples tarry at the entrance. If thou treatest him well, they will carry praises of thee to Jerusalem.

HERODIAS

How unlike thou art to thy mother, Salome!

SALOME

And how like, too!

HEROD

I would rather think that thou wert unlike. My sweet, unveil thyself.

SALOME

Sire, if thou wert my father! But thou art not. Directly thou comest near, my mother herself draweth my veil down deep over my breast.

HEROD

Unveil to me.

SALOME

Sire, not when I am alone with thee.

HEROD

Then if I was with others, thou wouldst?

SALOME

Perhaps. Ask my mother.

HEROD

A little now. Just a finger's length.

SALOME

No, really ... it is not seemly, Sire.

HEROD

But if I were sitting with other men ... at meat ... or over wine ... and thou camest and unveiled, that would be more seemly?

SALOME

May be!... I can dance, Sire.

HEROD

Wouldst thou do that for me also?

SALOME

And what wouldst thou do for me?

HEROD

Salome!

SALOME

[*Rising.*] No, but thou must indeed ask my mother, Sire. I am still far too ignorant; I know not what a maiden ought to do. Only what I would like to do. I know that well enough.

HEROD

What wouldst thou *like* to do?

SALOME

Thy pleasure, Sire. Nothing else, nothing. Seest thou, if thou treatest this prisoner humanely, they will sing thy praises, and I shall be so proud, I shall say in my heart, He acted on my advice.

HEROD

[*To the gaoler.*] Bring the Baptist here.... I will consider it, Salome.

[*Exit Gaoler.*]

SALOME

[*From the gate, with a slight fluttering of her veil.*] And I will thank thee, Sire!

HEROD

Salome!

SALOME

[*Vanishes, with a burst of laughter. Abi and Maecha have preceded her.*]

HEROD

[*Looks after her, and then sits down on the seat.*]

SCENE V

Herod, John. The Gaoler. A Guard.

HEROD

Tell me, how should one address thee when one would show thee respect? Thou thinkest that I mock thee? But knowest thou that in reality I am indebted to thee? The people's meditated attack was not hidden from me, and yet I came without the escort of warriors which Rome sent for my protection. Thou heldest me in the hollow of thy hand, as thou heldest the stone. Say, why didst thou let it fall? Why hast thou spared me?

JOHN

Sire, even if I spoke thou wouldst not understand me.

HEROD

That is defiance, which I cannot praise. In chains it is easy to be defiant. Take off his chains and go. [*The Gaoler obeys. Exit with the guard.*] Now, as a free man, revile me. Art thou a preacher of repentance? If so, preach to me!

JOHN

Sire, thou wouldst not understand me.

HEROD

So thou saidst before. Think of something new. Here in Galilee I am inclined to be mild and tolerant of goodness. I am told that thou hatest the Pharisees. I hate them too. I am told that thou hatest the priests. I love them not. I am told that thou hatest the Romans. I---- Say, why didst thou spare me?

JOHN

Sire, my heart failed me.

HEROD

Failed thee! Before me, whom thou callest "the little"! Art thou flattering me because I have loosened thee from thy chains?

JOHN

Thou hast not laid me in chains, and canst not loosen me from them.

HEROD

What ... and yet I made thee falter?

JOHN

It was Another who threw thee in my way.... And so my heart failed me.

HEROD

Tell me, Baptist--I call thee by the name I have heard people speak of thee by, and I hope thou wilt not be angry--tell me, Who is that King of the Jews whose image thou danglest before the people?... See, the guards are gone, and thy confidence shall be rewarded. Tell me, who is it?

JOHN

Sire, I know not.

HEROD

And so thou deniest thy own creature?

JOHN

What is my own I deny.

HEROD

Ha, ha, ha! I have half a mind to summon my little Greek that he may go to school under thee. Listen [*in a low voice*], I too have heard of a King of the Jews who will come with a sword drawn above his head, and he will spare no one who doth not serve him at the right moment.

JOHN

[*Eagerly.*] Who is it, of whom thou speakest?

HEROD

Master, I do not know. Thou seest thus that I too have a burden of secret anxiety oppressing me, and await the sunrise.... But let me speak with thee seriously, Baptist. Thou hurlest thy arrows of reproach at me on account of the woman I stole.... I could almost pity thee for that. Thou, a great man, mightst have chosen a greater subject than a woman. And knowest thou every day she sharpens those arrows herself for me?... But enough of that. The smiths say that good metal rings true even when it is cracked, and thou ringest true. How dost thou manage it?... I pray thee teach me the way.... What, silent again?

JOHN

Methinks I know you now, ye smiling scoffers. Ye grow fat on the wit of the market-places; but hunger seizes you, and ye then lift your eyes to the earnest ones, walking on the mountain-tops.

HEROD

By Bacchus, there lurks some truth in that. But it's not good walking on the mountain-tops. We wait to see you fall; then we shall not smile, but laugh.

JOHN

But I say unto thee, Sire, thou wilt not laugh. He Who cometh requireth me not. That is why He cast me down.... Gaze into His eyes when He comes, and thou wilt not laugh, even at me.

HEROD

It seems to me thy reasoning is poor, and revolves in a circle.... And yet there is something that attracts me to thee. Baptist, thou hast so long been my enemy, couldst thou not possibly be my friend?

JOHN

Sire, meseemeth that to be nobody's enemy and nobody's friend is the right of the lonely. It is their all. Let me keep it.

HEROD

Yet I do not give thee up as lost. If thou wert so minded we might pursue the same paths for a spell.

JOHN

Whither, Sire?

HEROD

Whither? Upwards!

JOHN

For thee there is no upwards. Thou bearest the times that are and were before thee, like an ulcerous evil, on thy body. Burnest thou not from all their poisonous lusts? Art thou not weighted by their unholy desires? And thou wouldst mount to the heights. Stay in the market-place and smile.

HEROD

Baptist, take care. Thy chains lie not far off.

JOHN

Let me be chained, Sire; I ask for nothing better.

HEROD

[*Gnashing his teeth.*] Truly thou art ruled by a broken spirit. [*After a little reflection.*] Yet tell me, Baptist, when that other cometh, that other----Say, was it in His Name that thou didst not throw the stone at me?

JOHN

[*Confused.*] Sire, what dost thou ask?

HEROD

Was it in His Name? For if so, thy Jewish king shall not rob my nights of sleep. Ha! ha! Here, gaoler! [*The gaoler comes.*] The prisoner shall go in and out as he pleaseth, for he is not dangerous.

GAOLER

[*Dumfounded, then in a low voice.*] Sire, how shall my life be safe, if---

HEROD

And his disciples, who loiter about the gates. Let them in and out as often as he wishes.... Now, did this God's people ever know a more clement master than I? [*Laughing, walks away.*]

SCENE VI

John and the Gaoler. Later, Maecha, Salome.

GAOLER

Well, thou art now thy own master. What are thy commands?

JOHN

The Tetrarch spoke of my disciples---

MAECHA

[*Appearing in the gateway to left.*] He is alone.

SALOME

[*Signs to the Gaoler. Exeunt Maecha and Gaoler.*]

JOHN

What wilt thou?

SALOME

Master, seest thou the sun sinking yonder between the pomegranate boughs?

JOHN

I see it.

SALOME

Knowest thou whose doing it is that thou art able to see it ere it goeth down, and ere thou goest down? Mine!

JOHN

May be. What dost thou want?

SALOME

Thou shalt not go down. Not thou. For my soul is thirsty. Teach me, master.

JOHN

What shall I teach thee?

SALOME

See, I am pious by nature, and I have a longing for salvation.... What thou givest to the humblest by the highway, give also to me. Let me sit at thy feet. I will be pious. Yea, I will. And if I touch thy hairy shirt, then be not frightened. I mean thee no harm.

JOHN

Why shouldst thou mean me harm, young virgin?

SALOME

Who can say ... if thou shouldst reject me! No one knows how powerful I am to-day. When I stretch my limbs [*she spreads out her arms*] it seems to me as if I carried the whole world like this ... only to hug it to my heart.

JOHN

Maiden, thou hast a playmate.

SALOME

[*Attentively.*] Which playmate?

JOHN

Her name is Miriam.

SALOME

I *had* her. Now she is dead.

JOHN

[*Bows his head. His suspicions realized.*]

SALOME

I had her slain because she went to thee. No one shall go to thee except me. Seest thou now how pious I am? Seest thou? My soul feels thy strength, and feels it with joy; for I have never seen anyone so strong as thou art. I have made thankofferings and secret vows like those the Psalms sing of. Then I have been forth in the gloaming to seek thy countenance and the light of thy eyes. And I have decked my bed with beautiful, many-coloured rugs from Egypt, and I have sprinkled my pillows with myrtle, aloes, and cinnamon. I will give thee my fair young body, thou barbarian among the sons of Israel! Come, let us make love till morning. And my playmates shall keep watch on the threshold, and greet the dawn with their harps.

JOHN

Verily, thou art powerful; thou carriest the world in thy arms ... for thou art sin itself.

SALOME

Yes. Sweet as sin.... That am I.

JOHN

Go!

SALOME

Thou spurnest me! Spurnest me? [*She rushes through the gate.*]

SCENE VII

John, Josaphat, Manassa, Amarja.

JOHN

[*Goes to the door, where the Gaoler is waiting.*]

GAOLER

Wouldst thou see thy disciples now?

JOHN

Bring them to me.

[*Manassa, Amarja hasten to him and kiss his garment. Josaphat hangs back.*]

JOHN

Matthias is not with you?

JOSAPHAT

No.

JOHN

What, Josaphat, thou who wast ever the nearest to me, hast thou no greeting to give?

JOSAPHAT

[*Turns away.*]

JOHN

Well, then, what is it?

JOSAPHAT

Rabbi, it is written ... One knife sharpens another, and one man another ... but thou hast made us blunt.

JOHN

And thou hast come this long way to tell me that?

JOSAPHAT

Rabbi, thou shouldst be the way that all the erring follow. Thou shouldst strengthen weak knees and mould trembling hands to the sword's hilt. Thy work was wrath, Rabbi, but thou hast made of it a sophistry and a weakness.

JOHN

Thou art not to know what my work was. Had I known myself, I should not be here. Truly the time of my fall is come, when enemies sing my praises and friends speak ill of me. What would ye have me do? My end must be in solitude and silence.

JOSAPHAT

Thy end, Rabbi, is no concern of ours. It is for Israel's end that I fear. Thou tookest the law from us. What hast thou given us instead?

JOHN

Who art thou, that like a kennelled hound, thou bitest at my shanks? *I* took the law from you? My soul hath wrestled with the law till it is weary; my forehead beat against its walls till it bled! But now ye have opened your mouths wide that salvation should slip down them like sweet crumbs. Ye gazed up at me so long as I stood erect, and now shrink away like cowards from my fall. I have not fallen for myself, I fell for you. To you it was a compulsion and a matter of watching. To me it was voluntary, and a combat at the sword's point.... Look at me! Twice to-day I have been face to face with the world's sin. But it seemed to me almost fair, for I have yet to meet the worst. Thou art a renegade! Thou hast ever been a renegade, and renegades will ye be to all eternity, ye men of universal utility, who manure your acres with the blood of those who have died for you! Go! I am weary of you!

JOSAPHAT

I am going, Rabbi, whither Matthias hath gone before me, to Jesus of Nazareth.

JOHN

[*Startled and moved.*] To Jesus of Nazareth?

JOSAPHAT

[*Turns silently to go out.*] [Exit.

SCENE VIII

Manassa, Amarja, John.

JOHN

How Amarja, and how Manassa? Those whom I trusted the most have forsaken me, and ye are still here!

AMARJA

Rabbi, I was at all times the least among thy disciples. What should I be worth if I were not faithful?

MANASSA

And to me, Rabbi, thou hast given a hope.

JOHN

Yet he is gone to Jesus of Nazareth. Be ye not fools. Go with him.

MANASSA

Let us be fools, Rabbi.

JOHN

[*Sitting down on a stone.*] So seat yourselves with me. Night draweth nigh, and I am weary. Harken! It was even as if I heard a beating of wings above me. Did ye hear nothing?

AMARJA

Nothing, Rabbi.

JOHN

The womb of my soul is opened. I am ready for the blessing from on high. Is there not a whispering, roundabout? Heard ye nothing?

MANASSA

Nothing, Rabbi.

JOHN

There is a light shining over yonder mountains. Lovely is that light, and within me dawns the meaning of a contradiction. Who alone can deliver the world? To obtain it as a gift is to stretch forth your hands for the unobtainable.... We are in Galilee, know ye, where He now teacheth, this Jesus of Nazareth!

AMARJA

We heard in the streets that He was not far off. He tarries on the sea-coast.

MANASSA

And they say He may perhaps come into the town.

JOHN

Mayhap. Yet only mayhap! And my time is over. I must make haste, lest I die. Will ye do me a service?

AMARJA, MANASSA

Rabbi, command us!

JOHN

Get ye up and go unto Him.

AMARJA, MANASSA

To Him?

JOHN

[*Nods.*] And wheresoever ye find Him, speak to Him. Ask: "Art Thou He Who cometh, or shall we wait for another?" So ask Him, and when He hath answered, come back--quickly--for my longing for Him is very great. I believe I could not die ere ye returned.

AMARJA

Master, we will not pause or rest.

JOHN

And ye will not forget my darkness in His radiance?

MANASSA

Master, why makest thou us ashamed?

JOHN

Then, farewell.

MANASSA, AMARJA

Farewell, Rabbi. [*They turn to go.*]

JOHN

Go not thus; not yet. Let me clasp your hands, then ye are the least among my disciples, and [*in great emotion*] methinks I--I--love you.

[*The Curtain falls.*]

FIFTH ACT

FIFTH ACT

Hall in Herod's Palace. A row of pillars, raised by two steps, in the background, which lead to an open balcony with balustrade. This can be shut off by curtains, which at first are thrown back. A street is supposed to run at the foot of the next storey. In the middle of the stage, raised on a dais, is a table, with couches ranged round it; flowers and ornaments. Doors to right and left.

SCENE I

Servants moving about arranging pictures and flowers, Gabalos superintending them; afterwards, Herod.

A SERVANT

[*Announces from door on left.*] Our governor!

HEROD

[*Following him.*] Now, Gabalos, thou who hast washed in many waters, what has thy art provided? Thou knowest our guests are spoiled children.

GABALOS

Sire, thou needest have no anxiety about food and drink. Something customary is best for jaded palates. Therefore I chartered the cook of Vitellius. But for the other part of the entertainment the prospect is bad.

HEROD

[Smiling.] Is that thy opinion?

GABALOS

Noble Merokles will declaim a new ode, I warrant. Our Libyan flute-players will have washed their brown legs in honour of the occasion. Sire, mistrust those legs even when washed. As I tell thee every day, we are sick of Judean morality. Judean morality is devouring us like the plague.

HEROD

Say, Gabalos, dost thou think that our Legate from Syria, before whom all the gaiety and colour of life doth shimmer, hath ever seen a young daughter of Princes dance at table?

GABALOS

That would be grand, because it is something new.

SCENE II

The same. Herodias [from right].

HEROD

[Noticing her.] Get thee gone!

[Gabalos and the servants withdraw to the background, where they let down the curtains which now shut in the hall.]

HEROD

What hast thou decided? Will it come to pass?

HERODIAS

Thy countenance beams. Thy eyes betray a badly concealed desire.

HEROD

[Bewildered] Of what desire dost thou speak?

HERODIAS

Do not prevaricate. I know thee, my friend. The poisonous weed which thou cultivatest with little sighs, and coverest up with thy crooked smiles, I know it!

HEROD

I vow, love, that I ask this only for the sake of the Roman. And how should I ever have conceived the idea had it not been for thy half-promises and suggestion of its possibilities? Thou knowest as well as I that we must offer the Roman something immense, something that may not have faded from his tired memory when he enters Cæsar's presence.

HERODIAS

That is it. And thou thyself gainest thereby a dainty tit-bit for thy lonely night-dreams! It will be nothing more than that. I'll see to it.

HEROD

I am simple of understanding. I cannot follow thee.

HERODIAS

Oh, yes; very simple is thy understanding. I know.

HEROD

Then it seems thou refusest?

HERODIAS

How could I refuse, when youth smiled and consented?

HEROD

Ah! And what reward wilt thou claim?

HERODIAS

Nothing.

HEROD

Thou art like those priests, dearest. What didst thou ever do for nothing? Hasten then, I pray, to name thy price!

HERODIAS

Farewell!

HEROD

[Looks after her, shaking his head.]

HERODIAS

[Turning round.] Before I forget it, just tell me, my friend, what art thou going to do with that Baptist?

HEROD

My Baptist is nothing to thee.

HERODIAS

The maids tell me he wanders about loose in the gardens.

HEROD

Let him; he will not hurt thee.

HERODIAS

I only asked, because I wish to know how I am to avoid him.

HEROD

I'll take care, love, that he doth not meet thee. But enough of the Baptist. Once more thy price, Herodias?

HERODIAS

Look at me! Here is a woman that no longer adorns her own body because thou now scornest it; she therefore adorns instead the body that came from hers. Here is a woman whose breasts have withered because her eyes have shed tears of blood. Therefore she will let the budding bosom, from which the veil has never yet fallen, be exposed to thine and thy guests' lustful gaze. And for this sacrifice of unspeakable bitterness I ask nothing, for I am without wishes. One who can still hope shall ask. Salome shall ask.

HEROD

Salome ... I would rather it were so.

HERODIAS

And thou wilt grant what she asks?

HEROD

I know not. I will see. I will let myself be driven. For in combat with the strong that is the last resource of the weak. But take care whither thou drivest me.... Mistress! *[Exit.]*

SCENE III

Herodias, Salome.

SALOME

[Putting her head through the door.] Mother, am I to dance here?

HERODIAS

Come, softly. Art thou trembling, my dove? Art thou afraid of thy own will?

SALOME

Take my hand, mother. I am not trembling, because I know that thou art my will.

HERODIAS

Not I! thou must will.

SALOME

For only the one who willeth exerciseth power. [*As Herodias regards her suspiciously, she adds quickly.*] I read that in the Scriptures, mother. I did not understand what it meant.

HERODIAS

Listen to me, thou sharpwits. A carpet of Indian wool will be spread here, there the Prince will sit with the foreign guests.... Let not thy foot touch the stone, raise not thy eyes.... Dance thy dance modestly, and when thou hast finished, wipe signs of shame from thy face; hearken narrowly to what the Tetrarch saith to thee. And if he should say, "Now ask of me, and----"

SALOME

What then, mother?

HERODIAS

Ask nothing.... Then look at him for the first time a long, smiling look, and ... ask nothing. After that thou mayest demand.

SALOME

[*Attentive.*] What shall I demand, mother? A gold hair-ornament, or shoes of velvet? No; I know what I'll demand--a mirror.

HERODIAS

[*Passing her hand through Salome's hair.*] Verily thou hast never felt hate to boil in thy breast, like love on a night in May?

SALOME

[*Feigning innocence.*] No, mother. How should I?

HERODIAS

Thou hast never felt an insult coursing through thee, like burning, liquid fire?

SALOME

[*In the same tone.*] No, mother; really I have not.

HERODIAS

Thou shalt demand no mirror, no hair-ornament, and no velvet shoes. But that the head of him they call John the Baptist shall be brought to thee on a dish.

SALOME

[*Setting her teeth, and controlling herself with difficulty.*] On a golden dish?

HERODIAS

What dost thou say? Understandest thou me not or--who----

SALOME

There's something else. One thing more I want to be sure of! Will *he* know--that ... that Baptist, from whom the request cometh?

HERODIAS

[*Breaking out*] Certainly, he shall know! I will stand behind thy bloody trophy as thy will.

SALOME

[*Half to herself.*] As the will of my will?

HERODIAS

I will grow over him, as the sword groweth forth from the sleeve of the executioner ... [*Trumpets sound.*] Come!

SALOME

And I will grow over him like a sweet grapevine. [*Exeunt both, to right.*]

SCENE IV

Herod. Vitellius. Marcellus (and other Romans of the Legate and suite), Merokles, Gabalos, Jabad.

HEROD

Welcome to my table, exalted Vitellius, who bringest on the soles of thy feet the sacred soil of Rome into my poor dwelling. Welcome to you also, ye who follow him, according to Rome's command. She, our august mother, but ordereth what my soul desireth.

VITELLIUS

Thou hast my thanks, excellent prince.

HEROD

Repose now at thy pleasure, exalted one. [*They lie on the couches.*]

GABALOS

[*Low.*] Say, my brave Marcellus, how dost thou like this Jewish ear-wig?

MARCELLUS

It doth not find its way to our ears.

HEROD

And if thou wilt consent to crown thy brow with this wreath, as our Lord and Master, I shall be able to persuade myself that I am thy guest, instead of thou being mine.

VITELLIUS

Thou art *Rome's* guest, Highness. Thus I will accept what befitteth me. [*Puts on the wreath which a servant hands to him.*]

GABALOS

There was a sting in that speech.

HEROD

[*Quickly collecting himself.*] My good Merokles, begin.

MEROKLES

[*Stands up and reads from a roll of parchment.*]

"Cooled by Hebron's far-gleaming snow,
The fiery soul, concealed in ice,
Favours with its flickering smile
Us the worshippers.

"So thou sendest forth twofold beams of silent light,
So flames for us shoot forth from thy coldness,
So we prize as sacred thy flickering smile, mighty Vitellius--
Till we----"

VITELLIUS

My dear friend, what is this man talking about?

HEROD

Doth it displease thee, Exalted One?

VITELLIUS

It seemed to me that he called my name. In the case of his desiring a favour, it shall be immediately granted if he promises to keep silent for the future!

GABALOS

Oh, friends, what a success!

VITELLIUS

Nevertheless, thy peacock's liver is good, very good, my dear Herod.

HEROD

Thou rejoicest me, Exalted Highness. Wilt thou not now command thy Libyan flute-players to come and charm thy ear?

VITELLIUS

My ear is obedient. Let them come.

SCENE V

[*The same. Salome (thickly veiled) led in by Herodias while the harps are tuned. A murmur of astonishment runs round the table.*]

VITELLIUS

Are these thy Libyan----

HEROD

[*Who has risen.*] This is my wife, Exalted Highness.

VITELLIUS

[*Also rising.*] Mistress, if thou wouldst grace this feast with thy smiles, I bid thee welcome.

HERODIAS

Pardon, noble Vitellius. The custom of the East, over which thou reignest so gloriously, doth not permit of my sitting beside thee at table. Yet we know how to entertain even when we are not merry. My lord and consort, zealous to please thee, hath commanded me to adorn myself and my little daughter to enter thy presence, therewith she may delight thy eyes with her maidenly art, trembling in maidenly modesty.

VITELLIUS

Hail to thee, Prince, and to thy noble wife! Rome will not be grudging where thou art so lavish. Hearest thou not?

HEROD

[*With his eyes fixed on Salome.*] Exalted, look!

VITELLIUS

Truly, he is right; let us look, Romans. Open your eyes wide, for what is coming is the art of all arts. And if thou tremblest, maiden, remember that thou rulest because thou tremblest.

MARCELLUS

One is obliged to say that, Gabalos, to encourage her.

GABALOS

Ah, my brave Marcellus, see to it, is it fast on its neck?

MARCELLUS

Who? What?

GABALOS

The head! the head! Look at Herodias. That will cost some one his head! Only *whose* has not

yet transpired.

MARCELLUS

[*Pointing to Salome.*] Silence!... See!...

SALOME

[*Has extricated herself from the arms of Herodias and, accompanied by exclamations of admiration and delight, has begun to dance. Her dance becomes wilder and more abandoned; she gradually loosens her veil, then covers herself with it again in voluptuous playfulness, till at last, quite unveiled, she stands with the upper part of her body apparently unclothed. She sinks on her knees half exhausted, half in homage, before Herod, who stands on the right side of the table.*]

[*All break into ecstasies of applause.*]

HEROD

[*Rushes forward to raise her.*]

HERODIAS

[*Who has retreated as far as the proscenium on right, and has watched everything intently with a harassed expression playing on her face, now intervenes to prevent him. She and Herod exchange hostile glances.*]

HEROD

[*Hoarsely.*] Salome!

SALOME

Sire!

HEROD

Stand up and speak.

SALOME

[*Slowly rising.*] What shall I say, Sire?

HEROD

I am a poor man. Rome--who gave Herod's son, as if in mockery, the name of Herod--Rome has not left him much of his father's heritage. Yet enough is still his wherewith to thank thee. Speak, what wilt thou have? And by that God and Lord before whom we kneel in the dust, barefoot, at Jerusalem, I swear it shall be thine.

SALOME

I beg and desire that thou wilt give me, on a dish, the head of John the Baptist.

HEROD

Herodias--thou!

VITELLIUS

Dear friend, whose head doth she want?

HEROD

The head of a man, great legate, who lies in my prison, whom I have there learnt to respect, I had almost said, to love.

VITELLIUS

Oh, oh!... And is he on view, this man for whose head daughters of princes dance before thee?

HEROD

Fetch him. [*Exit servant.*] Damsel, thy mother led thee into this. Thou knowest not what thou askest.... Take back thy request.

SALOME

I beg and desire that thou wilt give me the head of John the Baptist on a golden dish. [*Silence.*]

HEROD

And if I refuse?

HERODIAS

[*Drawing herself erect.*] Thou hast sworn, Sire.

VITELLIUS

[*Laughing.*] Of course, my friend, thou hast sworn. We are all witnesses of that. Ah! What a wood-god they are bringing in over there.

SCENE VI

The same. John [led in by two armed men].

HEROD

I have summoned thee, Baptist. I am sorry for thee. Prepare thyself, for the evening of thy days is come.

JOHN

I am ready, Sire.

HEROD

Understand me. I am truly sorry. But thou must meet death. Now, on the spot.

JOHN

[After looking searchingly towards the door.] Sire, grant me a respite.

VITELLIUS

Thy hero doth not appear to be all too ready. A little more and he would whimper.

HEROD

Baptist, wherefore dost thou want this respite?

JOHN

I have sent out messengers and await their return.

HEROD

To whom hast thou sent these messengers?... Thou art silent.... As I said before. I am from my heart sorry. So much might have been made of thee.... Still ... *[He shrugs his shoulders.]*

JOHN

[Holding out his arms distressed.] I beseech thee, Sire!

VITELLIUS

Did not I tell you? All kinds of people struggle to live, only the Roman understands how to die.

HEROD

Thou must ask the maiden, Baptist. Know that in her hands rests what chance thou hast of the thing called life.

SALOME

Master, now see'st thou how powerful I am? Now ask me! Ask me!

HERODIAS

[Prompting her, behind.] If he does ask, laugh at him.

SALOME

Perhaps, but who knoweth what my heart desireth?... Now, master, why dost thou not beg?

JOHN

Maiden ... I ...

SALOME

There is the stone floor, see! The stone longs for the touch of thy knees.

[Pause.]

SCENE VII

The same. The Gaoler.

HEROD

What brings thee here?

GAOLER

Forgive, Sire. Had I not known that thou wast friendly towards the prisoner ...

HEROD

What dost thou want with him?

GAOLER

Two of his friends who were with him yesterday, the same thou sawest outside the gate, have come back, and learning that his life is now in jeopardy--thy servant hath told me, and I have got everything ready--they became like creatures possessed, and implored me to lead them to him wheresoever he might be.

HEROD

Dost thou approve, Mighty Legate?

VITELLIUS

Dear friend, this is the most enjoyable entertainment that has ever been provided for me at meat. Let them come! Let them come!

HEROD

[Signs.]

GAOLER

[Retires behind curtain of door and beckons.]

SCENE VIII

The same. Manassa. Amarja.

[They seem at first as if they would rush to John, but overcome by shyness stand still.]

JOHN

What have ye to tell me?

MANASSA

Master!

HEROD

Speak louder, my good men! Unless ye let us participate in the news, I will have you carried off through separate doors.

MANASSA

May we, Master?

JOHN

Speak freely, for methinks we are alone together.

MANASSA

We took the road in all haste to Bethesda, and at break of day we found Him there.

JOHN

Ye found him there?

MANASSA

And many people were gathered about him resting in the olive gardens, and praised the Lord for the miracle which had been done to them at that hour. And behold there was a light in every eye, and in every mouth the music of thanksgiving.

JOHN

And He? How looked His countenance? What were His gestures?

MANASSA

Master, I know not.

JOHN

But ye saw Him?

AMARJA

Rabbi, thou mightest as well ask, What is the face of the sun, and what the gestures of light?... As we beheld His smile we sank to the ground, and in our souls was a great peace.

JOHN

And when ye had questioned Him, and He began to speak, tell me what was His manner of speech? Say; I stand here awaiting His wrath.

AMARJA

Rabbi.... He spoke to us like a brother. His speech was simple.

MANASSA

And it was beautiful ... like the voice of the wind which blows from the sea towards evening.

AMARJA

And this is what He spake. "Go and tell John what ye have seen and heard. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

JOHN

The poor--He said the poor?

MANASSA

And when He prepared to come hither to this town with the people who were gathered about Him, we accompanied Him as far as the gate, and then hurried on before, according to thy wish.

JOHN

And said He nothing else to you? Reflect well.

AMARJA

Yes; yet one more thing. He said, "Blessed be he who hath not been offended at me." But this we could not understand.

JOHN

But I understand it well and to whom He spoke. I have been offended, for I have not recognized Him. And my anger filled the world, for I knew Him not. Ye yourselves are my witnesses that I have said, "I am not the Christ, but one sent to prepare the way for Him that cometh." A man can take nothing to himself that is not given him by Heaven. And unto me nothing was given. The key of death ... I held it not ... the scales of sin were not confided to me. For out of no man's mouth may the name of sin sound, save out of the mouth of the one that loveth. But I would have scourged you with iron rods. Therefore is my kingdom come to shame, and my lips are sealed. I hear roundabout a rushing noise, as of many waters, and the divine radiance is near me.... A throne hath descended out of heaven amidst darts of fire. The King of Peace sitteth thereon in white robes. And His sword is called Love, and His watchword is mercy.... Behold He hath the bride, He is the bridegroom. But the friend of the bridegroom standeth and listeneth, and rejoiceth over the voice that is coming. The same is my joy. Now is it fulfilled. [*He stands with his arms outspread and his eyes turned towards heaven. Manassa and Amarja sink at his feet.*]

VITELLIUS

Dear friend, it seems to me that we have had enough of this maniac.

HEROD

[*Between emotion and scorn.*] John, I am truly grieved on thy account. And when He cometh of whom thou dreamest, I will greet Him as I have greeted thee. Ha! ha! ha! Lead him to execution.

SALOME

Now, ask me! [*As John smilingly looks beyond her.*] Mother, will he not ask?

SCENE IX

Vitellius, his suite, Herod, Herodias, Salome, Merokles, Gabalos, Jabad.

VITELLIUS

My friend, thy banquet has been somewhat disturbed. [*As Herod stares at the door through which John has disappeared.*] No matter what I say, he does not hear me.

HEROD

Exalted highness, pardon!

SALOME

[Has crossed over the stage and goes stealthily to the door on left. In great curiosity she draws back the curtain, and after gazing eagerly through it, reels backwards into the arms of Herodias. Outside, behind the middle curtain, an ever-increasing tumult and murmur of many voices has arisen.]

VITELLIUS

Bid the women to sit down. Thou hast an ill-conducted people. They brawl in the street while we dine.

HEROD

Are they already muttering about the Baptist? Gabalos, look to it, and tell them to be quiet.

GABALOS

It shall be done, Sire. [*Exit.*]

SALOME

[Pointing to the door, the curtains of which are open.] Mother, see what they are bringing. See! [*She rushes out.*]

HEROD

[Descending the steps of the dais.] What does she want there?

HERODIAS

Sire, thou art of simple understanding. I advise thee to look the other way.

HEROD

What is she doing?

HERODIAS

She is dancing! She holds the charger with the Prophet's head high in her arms, and dances.

JABAD

See, she dances!

HEROD

So thou hast corrupted thy own flesh and blood. So thou wilt corrupt us all.

HERODIAS

[Smiling, shrugs her shoulders.]

MEROKLES

She sways. She will fall!

HERODIAS

[Goes out composedly.]

MEROKLES

The head is rolling on the floor!

MARCELLUS

Oh, horror!

HERODIAS

[Comes back supporting Salome in her arms.]

SALOME

Mother, where is the dish? Where is the head?

HERODIAS

Make obeisance. Speak thy thanks.

SALOME

[Before Herod.] Sire, I am a rose of Sharon. A flower of the valley ... Who would thank me should pluck me ... Oh, look at the head!

HEROD

Take the women away!

HERODIAS

[Curtseys, and leads, smiling; the half-swooning Salome off to right.]

SCENE X

*The same. [Without Herodias and Salome.]
Gabalos [has re-entered from left].*

HEROD

Well, what is the matter?

GABALOS

Sire, the people will not be restrained. Men and women in holiday raiment fill the streets and crowd on the roofs. They carry palms in their hands, and sing and shout for joy.

HEROD

What are they singing?

GABALOS

Thou knowest, Sire, I am not servile, but I scarcely like to say.

HEROD

Speak!

GABALOS

Hosannah! to Him Who shall come. Hosannah to the King of the Jews! So they sing.

HEROD

[Grinding his teeth.] I have had John beheaded. Who may this one be?

GABALOS

If thou wouldst see Him, Sire, they say He is coming this way.

HEROD

I will see Him. I will greet Him as I promised. Ha! ha! ha! Open!

SCENE XI

[The curtains are drawn aside. One sees the roofs crowded with women waving palms. Others, with palms in their hands, climb the hilly street below. The shouting swells in volume and becomes an orderly, harmonious song.]

VITELLIUS

[Who has continued sitting, turns round indignantly.] What is going on there again?

HEROD

[Has grasped a goblet, and springs on the topmost step.]

Greeting to thee, my King ---- of the ----

[He looks, stops short ... the goblet slips from his hand, he turns away and hides his face in his mantle.]

THE OTHERS

[Also stand, looking down in silent amazement. The Hosannahs rise from the street.]

[The Curtain falls.]

FINIS

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JOHN THE BAPTIST: A PLAY ***

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