Herod and Mariamne
A Tragedy in Five Acts by Friedrich Hebbel

Translated by Paul H. Curts
Herod and Mariamne
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The better works of foreign literature should be available to the reading public in English translation. The more nearly they are reproduced in the form and spirit of the original, the more such works enrich our own great store. It is with this in mind that I have translated Hebbel's masterpiece Herod and Mariamne, probably the greatest German drama of the nineteenth century.

Christian Friedrich Hebbel was born in the village of Wesselburen in Ditmarsch, Holstein, on March 18, 1813. He died in Vienna on December 13, 1863. The gloomy bleakness of northern Germany, the poverty of his home, the strict and sometimes violent discipline of his father had a permanent effect on his character. His was a serious, sensitive, imaginative nature, strong-willed even to the point of obstinacy.

Convinced early in life that he was to make his mark as a writer and a poet, he left his narrow provincial home and devoted himself to the achievement of his literary aims with an unswerving fixity of purpose—in spite of hunger, hardship, and disappointment. He endowed the characters of his dramas with the same fixity of purpose which he himself possessed, with a rigid, unswerving, relentless adherence to a point of view.

Hebbel was persuaded that the most tragic situations of life arise, not necessarily from any moral guilt, but rather from conflict between the individual will and its environment, and that this conflict is most significant when a vital change is taking place in the existing state of the world. His most important dramas are located at such critical times in history. In its early stages the conflict between the old established order and the representative of the new order is tragic for the new, but suggests hope for a brighter future. Such a conflict is the core around which most of Hebbel's tragedies are built. The individual undergoes a process of inner change and must inevitably suffer in a conflict with the whole, but the new cause is advanced, although it be but slightly. The Hegelian philosophy: thesis, antithesis, synthesis, is presented here in dramatic form.

The tragic story of Herod and Mariamne has appealed to many dramatists. For all of them the only historical source is Flavius Josephus in The Jewish War (75 A.D.) and The Antiquities of the Jews (93 A.D.). Hebbel is the first of these dramatists for whom the historical events are merely the background and for whom the real drama lies in the inner psychological development of the characters.

Herod was the King of Palestine from 37 B.C. to 4 A.D. The action takes place in the period just prior to the beginnings of Christianity. Though really an enlightened monarch for his day and even a reformer, Hebbel's Herod knows only the traditional methods of procedure, he still represents the old tyrannical order and represents it more completely
as the play develops. From our point of view the change in him is retrogressive. Although Mariamne can be just as ruthless as Herod toward those beneath her, there is in her the first suggestion of the new order. Conscious of her own worth as an individual, she expects trust and confidence from Herod. When she does not receive them, life loses all value for her, and she deliberately brings on her own death at the hands of Herod. Less rigid and unyielding characters might have reached a compromise. With characters such as Hebbel depicts, tragedy is unavoidable. Herod is not only in love with Mariamne, he is an Idumean and a king, as Mariamne is a Maccabean and the daughter of Alexandra. Try as he will, Herod cannot forget the king for love of Mariamne, nor can she forget the Maccabean for love of him (lines 1005 ff.). Tradition and heredity are too strong for them. The necessity for tragedy lies within the characters themselves, not outside of them in a superhuman power. This is the modern fate tragedy.

A forerunner of Ibsen and naturalism, Hebbel was too early for his contemporaries. The performance of *Herod and Mariamne* in Vienna in 1849 and that in Berlin in 1874 could not but fail miserably, for neither the public nor even the directors and the actors understood either Herod or Mariamne and the nature of their tragic inner struggle. With the turn of the twentieth century appreciation began to dawn and since then this drama has appeared with fair regularity on the important German stages, reaching a high of 158 performances in one season. *Herod and Mariamne* will never enjoy wide popularity with the masses. To appreciate Hebbel the audience must think as well as feel, and that is not the mood in which most people attend the theater.

Hebbel wrote his drama in unrhymed iambic pentameter. The form is that of the classic German drama. The language, however, is straightforward, realistic, contemporaneous. It is the common language of his day, not colloquial, but simple and dignified. To produce as nearly as possible the same effect in translation, I have used a dignified, straightforward, modern English, avoiding exalted diction on the one hand and obvious colloquialisms on the other. I have tried to express Hebbel's ideas as he might have expressed them, had English been his medium. Translation in this spirit is a difficult task in prose, doubly so when it must be metrical and at the same time faithfully render the meaning of the original. Even with the difficulties it is surprising how literal the translation can be.

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Paul H. Curtis.

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HEROD AND MARIAMNE
CHARACTERS

KING HEROD

MARIAMNE, his wife
ALEXANDRA, her mother
SALOME, sister of the king
SOEMUS, Governor of Galilea
JOSEPH, husband of Salome, Viceroy in absence of the King
SAMEAS, a Pharisee
TITUS, a Roman captain
JOAB, a messenger
JUDAS, a Judean captain
ARTAXERXES, a servant
Moses and JPHU, servants, as well as other servants
SILO, a citizen
ZERUBBABEL and PHILo, his son, Galileans

A Roman Messenger

AARON, and five other judges

THREE KINGS OF THE ORIENT, later called Saints by the Christian Church

Place: Jerusalem                      Time: about the birth of Christ
ACT I


SCENE 1

JOAB (advances toward the King).
I have returned!

HEROD. Save your report till later! The most important business first!

JOAB (stepping back, aside). Important!
I thought the most important was to learn Whether or not our head still sits secure!

HEROD (summons Judas).
Tell me about the fire!

JUDAS. About the fire?
So you already know the news I bring?

HEROD. That it broke out at midnight, yes. I was
The first who noticed it and called the watch.
If I am not mistaken, I woke you!

JUDAS. The fire is out. (aside) So what they say is true, That in disguise he prowls the streets
While others sleep! We must be on our guard
Lest careless words might sometime reach his ear.

HEROD. When everything stood wrapped in flame I saw A woman through the window of the house
Who seemed benumbed. Was this young woman saved?

JUDAS. She did not want to be!

HEROD. Not want to?

JUDAS. No!
She fought against them when they tried to take
Her out by force, she struck at them with hands
And feet, she clung with desperation to the bed
On which she sat, and cried that she had been
About to kill herself with her own hands
And now a kindly fate brought death to her.

HEROD. She must have been demented!

JUDAS. Possibly
Her mind had been upset by pain and grief!
Her husband had just died a while before,
His body lay still warm upon the bed.

HEROD (aside). That I will surely tell to Mariamne
And watch her while I tell her! (aloud) Probably
This woman had no child! But if she had,
I will take care of it! She shall herself
Be buried richly and with royal splendor,
She was, it may well be, the queen of women!
HEROD AND MARIAMNE

SAMEAS (steps forward). Be buried! That is not permissible! At least not here, not in Jerusalem!
For it is written in—
HEROD. Do I not know you?
SAMEAS. You had occasion once to know me, yes:
I served the Sanhedrin as tongue that time
When it sat mute before you.
HEROD. Sameas,
I hope you know me too! You hated Herod
When he was young. You would have liked so much
To make his head a present to the hangman.
The man and king has now forgotten that,
For you still have your own head on your shoulders.
SAMEAS. If for the reason that you let me keep it
I must not use it now, then take it from me;
That would be worse by far than losing it.
HEROD. Why did you come? Till now I never saw you
Within these walls.
SAMEAS. But that is just the reason
You see me now. Perhaps you thought I stood
In awe of you. I have no fear of you,
Not even now when many men have learned
To fear, who did not use to be afraid,
Before Aristobulus met his death.
And since the opportunity has come
To prove to you that I am thankful, I take
Advantage of it and give solemn warning
Against an act which God the Lord condemns.
Accursed are this woman's bones, for she
Resisted rescue as a Gentile might,
And that is quite as if she killed herself,
And since—
HEROD. Some other time! (to Zerubbabel) From Galilee!
Zerubbabel, who was—I bid you welcome!
The blame is yours, I did not see you sooner!
ZERUBBABEL. It is an honor, King, that you still know me!
(points to his mouth)
Of course these two great tusks of teeth I have,
That make me like the cousin to a boar—
HEROD. I would forget my own face sooner far
Than that of one who served me faithfully!
When we were hunting robbers to their lair
You tracked them best. What do you bring me now?
ZERUBBABEL (beckons his son).
In fact not much! Just Philo here, my son!
You have a need for soldiers, I do not,
And this boy is a Roman, whom, it happened,
A Hebrew woman brought into the world.
ACT I, SCENE 1

HEROD. What comes to me from Galilee is good!
You may expect a summons soon!

(Zerubbabel and his ston step back)

TITUS (steps forward). A fraud
Which I discovered forces me—

HEROD. Disclose it!
TITUS. The dumb speak!
HEROD. Please be clear!
TITUS. Your man-at-arms
Who stood on watch before your bedroom door
Last night with one of my centurions—
HEROD (aside). Whom Alexandra recommended to me,
My mother-in-law—I see!
TITUS. He is not dumb,
As everyone has always thought he was;
He spoke aloud last night in sleep, he cursed!

HEROD. In sleep?
TITUS. He fell asleep while standing watch,
And my centurion did not awake him;
He did not think he was responsible,
Because he is not in the cohort with him,
But yet he kept close watch, so as to catch him
If he should fall. For it was early still,
You were asleep, he did not want to rouse you.
Then suddenly, as he is watching him,
The dumb man starts to mumble, speaks your name,
And calls down fearful curses on your head.

HEROD. Can the centurion have been mistaken?
TITUS. He would have had to be asleep himself;
And that would be an omen worse by far
For the eternal city than the lightning
That struck the Capitoline wolf not long
Ago.
HEROD. I thank you! Now—(he dismisses all but Joab)
Yes, so things stand!

Rank treason in my house, and in the crowd
Of Pharisees defiance, bolder still
Because I can not punish them at all
Unless I make the fools appear as martyrs;
A little love among the Galileans,
No, mere attachment of a selfish sort,
Because I am the bogey with the sword
Who from the distance scares their rabble so;
And—this man Joab surely brings bad news,
He was too anxious to announce it to me.
For even he, although he is my servant,
Likes doing what will vex me, if he knows
That I must act as if I did not notice!
(to Joab) What news have you from Alexandria?

Joab. I spoke with Antony.

Herod. A strange beginning!

You spoke with Antony? I am accustomed
To have the messengers I send received;
You are the first who finds it necessary
Thus to assure me that he was successful.

Joab. They made it hard for me. They put me off,
Time after time!

Herod (aside). He stands then with Octavius
On better terms than I had thought! (aloud) That proves
To me, you failed to choose the proper hour.

Joab. I chose each one among the twenty-four
Of which the day consists; no matter how
They urged, I did not leave the spot, not even
When Roman soldiers offered me a meal,
And then, since I refused it, jeered at me:
He eats no food save what the cat has tasted
And what the dog has torn to shreds! At last
I was successful—

Herod. For a wiser man
It would have been at once—

Joab. And was received.

It was already night and first I thought
He had me summoned merely to continue
The sport the soldiers had in jeering at me,
For when I came inside I found a group
Of drinkers there, reclining at their ease.
But he himself poured out a glass for me
And said to me: Drink this to my good health!
And when I courteously declined to drink it,
He said: If I set out to kill this man
I only need to bring him to my table
For eight full days and on it place before him
The tribute earth and sea have rendered me,
He would not eat but only sit and starve
And dying swear that he had had his fill.

Herod. Yes, yes, they know us well. That must be changed.

What Moses ordered only to prevent
Their worshipping the Golden Calf again—
If he was not a fool—this people still
Observes as if it were an end itself,
And so is like the sick man who, when healed,
Continues still to take the remedy
As if he thought that medicine were food.
That must—Go on!

Joab. However, I was soon
Convinced that I was wrong, for while he drank
ACT I, SCENE 1

He carried out all business of the state,
He named the magistrates, and made arrangements
To sacrifice to Zeus, heard auguries,
And interviewed the messengers who came,
Not me alone. It was quite strange to see.  
A slave stood there behind him, ears alert,
A stylus and a tablet in his hand,
Ridiculously serious, recording
What he had said in his half drunken state.
Next morning then, still feeling the effects,
He read the tablet through, or so I heard,
And holds to all it says so faithfully
That he—they say he swore this recently—
Would choke himself to death with his own hands
If in his cups at night he gave away
The world o'er which he ruled, and had thereby
Renounced his rights to any place within it.
Whether he staggers then, as well as when
He goes to bed at night, I do not know;
That seems to me to be of no import.

HEROD. You win, Octavius! The only question:
If now or later. Well?

JOAB. When finally
My turn had come and I had given him
The letter which I had for him from you,
Instead of opening and reading it,
He tossed it to his clerk quite scornfully.
He had his servant bring a portrait; this
He bade me look at carefully and tell him
Whether I found the likeness good or not.

HEROD. It was the portrait . . . ?

JOAB. Of Aristobulus,
The young high priest, who drowned so suddenly.
The picture had been sent to him long since
By Alexandra, by your mother-in-law,
Who keeps in touch with him, and yet he gazed
With greedy eyes as if 'twere new to him.
I stood confused and silent there. He said,
When he saw this: Perhaps the lamps are burning
Too dimly here! and reached then for your letter,
Set it ablaze and let it burn out slowly
Before the picture like a blank white sheet.

HEROD. Bold! Even bold for him! But—he was drunk!

JOAB. I cried: What are you doing there? You have
Not even read it yet! And he replied:
I want to talk with Herod, that's the meaning!
A charge of murder has been brought against him!
And now he had me tell how this high priest
Had come to die. And when I said to him
A fainting spell had seized him in his bath, 205
He interrupted: Seized! Yes, yes, the word
Is chosen well; the fainting spell had hands!
And so I learned—forgive me if I say it!—
That they did not believe in Rome the youth
Had drowned, but rather they were quite convinced
That your own officers, at your command,
Had strangled him while bathing in the river.

HEROD. Thanks, Alexandra, thanks!

JOAB. He motioned me
To go and so I went. But then he called
Me back and said: As yet you have not answered
The question which I put to you at first,
So I repeat it. Is the picture like
The dead man? When perforce I nodded yes:
Is Mariamne like her brother? Does she
Look like the youth who died so shamefully?
Is she so beautiful all women hate her?

HEROD. And you?

JOAB. First hear the comments of the others,
Who left their seats and now were standing with me
Around the picture. Laughing they exchanged
Suggestive looks with Antony and said:
Say yes! if ever he befriended you,
Then you will see at least that he's avenged!
I said however that I did not know,
For I had never seen the Queen except
When she was veiled, and that is really true!

HEROD (aside). Ah, Mariamne! But—I laugh at that;
For I shall know how to protect myself
From that, somehow, however it may come!
(to Joab) What message did he give to you for me?

JOAB. Why none! If I had had a message for you
I would not need to tell you all of this.
But now I thought I must!

HEROD. It's well! You shall
Return at once to Alexandria
With me and must not leave the royal palace.

JOAB. I shall not even talk to anyone.

HEROD. That I believe! For no one likes to die
Upon the cross while figs are ripening!
The dumb man shall be slain and should he ask
The reason, say to him: Since you can ask!
(to himself) And now I know through whom that wily serpent
So often learned what I—A wicked woman!
(to Joab) Take care of that! I want to see his head,
I plan to send it to my mother-in-law!
ACT I, SCENES 2 AND 3

(aside) She needs a sign of warning as it seems.

JOAB. At once!

HEROD. One other thing! The Galilean
Shall take his place, Zerubbabel's son Philo,
I want to speak with him before we leave. (exit Joab)

SCENE 2

HEROD (alone). Now comes the test! Once more! I almost said,
But I can see no end. I'm like the man
They tell of, whom the lion seized in front,
The tiger from behind, and whom the vultures
With beaks and talons threatened from above,
While he stood on a nest of vipers! Good!
I shall defend myself as best I can
Against each enemy with his own weapons,
Let that from now on be my rule and law!
How long it lasts, that shall not worry me
If I but hold my ground until the end
And lose no thing that I have called my own,
Then let the end come now, or when it will!

SCENE 3

SERVANT (enters). The Queen! (Mariamne follows him)

HEROD (goes to meet her). You steal a march on me, I was
About to—

MARIAMNE. Not to come yourself to get
The thanks I owe you for your wondrous pearls?
I have refused to see you twice, to try
Again to see if I had changed my mind,
That would have been too much for any man
And certainly too much for you, a king.
No, I know my duty and since you
Have heaped rich gifts upon me every day
Since my gay brother's sudden death, as if
You're wooing me anew, so now at last
I come to show you my appreciation.

HEROD. I see!

MARIAMNE. Of course I do not know just what
Your purpose is. You send the diver down
For me into the sea's dark depths and when
No diver can be found who will disturb
Leviathan's repose for money wage,
You open up your jails and give the robber
His head again, which he had forfeited,
That he may serve you fishing pearls for me.

HEROD. And does that seem absurd to you? Why once
I had them take a murderer from the cross,
When there was need to save a child from flames
That threatened it, and said to him: If you
Can bring it safely to its mother, I
Agree the debt you owe to death is paid.
He plunged at once into the flames—

And did he come out again?

It was too late. I would
Have kept my word and would have sent him off
To Rome to fight, where they have need of tigers.
It’s best to make full use of everything,
I think, why not of lives thus forfeit?
For cases do arise where one can use them.

Oh, would he did not have the bloody hands!
Best say no more! Whatever he has done
Seems good when once he comes to speak of it.
How frightful it would be, if he compelled me
To find my brother’s murder necessary,
Yes, unavoidable and justified!

Shall I speak? Of pearls perhaps!
Till now it was alone of pearls we spoke,
Of pearls which are so pure and clean and white
That even in bloody hands they never lose
Their lucid splendor! You are giving me
Great heaps of them.

It troubles you?
Not me!
You surely can not wish to pay a debt
With them, and it would seem to me I have
A perfect right as wife and queen to pearls
And jewels. It is quite right for me to speak
Of precious stones as Cleopatra did:
They are my servants and I pardon them
That they cannot outshine the stars for me,
In spite of that they do surpass the flowers!
You have a sister, though, Salome—

She—

Well, if you aim to have her murder me,
Then keep right on, despoil the sea for me,
If not, then give the diver respite! I stand
Already deep enough in debt to her!
You seem to doubt? I lay a year ago
Quite sick and close to death, she kissed me then.
It was the first and only time. I thought
At once: The kiss is your reward, because
You are about to die! And so it was;
But she was disappointed, I recovered,
And now I have her kiss for nothing; that
She never has forgotten. So I fear
That she might think of that, if I should go
To see her with the pearls around my neck
By which you showed me last how much you love me!

**Herod (aside).** The only thing that still is lacking is
That my left hand should turn against my right.

**Mariamne.** I would at least disdain the drink of welcome;
If she should offer me instead of wine
A drink of water in a crystal glass,
I still would leave the water quite untouched:
Of course that would not mean a thing! No! That
Would even be quite natural, for water
Seems to me no longer what it was:
A gentle element that waters flowers,
Refreshes me and all the world; it sends
A shudder through me, fills me now with horror,
Since my own brother died so suddenly;
I always think, within the drop dwells life,
But in the wave there dwells a bitter death;
For you it must be very different!

**Herod.** Why?

**Mariamne.** Because you have been slandered by a river
Which dares unload its own inhuman and
Malicious deed on you; but never fear,
For I dispute it!

**Herod.** Really?

**Mariamne.** I can do it!
To love the sister and to kill the brother,
The two can not be reconciled.

**Herod.** Perhaps!
If such a brother is himself intent
On killing, and if one can only save
Himself by matching him, yes acting first!
We're speaking here of possibilities!
And further! If he, unsuspecting, lets
Himself become a weapon in the hands
Of foes, a weapon which must strike and kill,
If not destroyed before it has been swung.
We're speaking here of possibilities!
And if it threatens not a single head—
No, if it is the head of all the people
And one as necessary to this people
As ever any head to any body.
We're speaking here of possibilities!
I think in all these cases that the sister,
As wife because of love she owes her husband,
As daughter of her people out of sacred
Duty, as queen because of both of these,
Must say: I dare not censure what has happened.

(he takes Mariamne's hand)
Although a Ruth might well not understand me—
How would she learn it plucking ears of grain—
A Maccabee will surely comprehend!
You could not kiss me there in Jericho
But surely in Jerusalem you can!

(he kisses her) And if this kiss should rue you nonetheless,
Then listen, and you will be reconciled:
I took the kiss as my farewell to you
And it may be, this parting is forever!

MARIAMNE. Forever?

HEROD. Yes! For Antony has summoned
Me. Whether I return, I do not know!

MARIAMNE. You do not know?

HEROD. Because I do not know

MARIAMNE (starts to speak).

HEROD. It makes no difference! I shall find it out.
But one thing I must know from your own lips:
Whether and how I shall defend myself.

MARIAMNE. Whether—

HEROD. Oh Mariamne, do not ask!
You know how strong the bond that holds me to you,
You know that every day but makes it stronger,
And you must surely realize, I now
Can not fight for myself if you do not
Assure me that your heart still beats for me!
Oh tell me whether ardently or coldly,
Then I will tell you whether Antony
Will call me brother, or perhaps condemn
Me to the subterranean dungeon where
Jugurtha died the death of slow starvation!
Why are you silent? Speak! For this confession
Does not, I feel, beseeem a king; he should
Not be subjected to the common lot
Of man, should not be bound within himself
To any being that's outside of him,
He should be bound to God alone, and I
Am not! When you a year ago lay sick
And at the point of death, I had the thought
That I would kill myself. I could not bear
To live if you were dead—you know this now,
So know one other thing! If ever I
Myself lay dying I could even do
What you expect Salome would, prepare
A poison in your wine and give it to you,
So I should still be sure of you in death!

MARIAMNE. If you did that, you would no doubt recover!
HEROD. Oh no! For I would share this poison with you!
But tell me whether you could e'er forgive
Such an excess of love as that would be!

MARIAMNE. If after drinking such a drink I still
Had only breath enough for one last word,
Then I would curse you with that final word.
(aside) Yes, all the more, the more I'm sure that I
Could reach out for the dagger in my grief
To kill myself if death should call you hence:
That one can do, not have it done to him!

HEROD. In this last night a fire consumed a woman
With her dead husband; and although they tried
To save her, she resisted. You probably
Despise this woman then?

MARIAMNE. Who says I do?
She was not forced to be a sacrifice,
She sacrificed herself and thus she proved
The man meant more to her than all the world.

HEROD. And you? And I?

MARIAMNE. If in yourself you feel
That you mean more to me than all the world,
What else is there to keep me in the world?

HEROD. The world! The world still has so many kings
And there is none among them who would not
Be glad to share his throne with you, would not
Desert his bride, cast out his wife for you,
And had the wedding been the night before!

MARIAMNE. Is Cleopatra dead, that you speak so?
HEROD. You are so beautiful, whoever sees you
Has to believe in immortality,
Of which the Pharisees so glibly speak,
For none believes your image ever could
Die out in him; so beautiful I should
Not be surprised if suddenly the mountains
Provided me a metal to adorn you
More precious far then even gold or silver,
A metal kept reserved until you came;
So beautiful that—Ah, to know you'll die
From love, the moment that another dies,
To hasten after him who went before,
To mingle in that sphere in which one is
And yet is not, for so I think of it,
As your last breath and his last breath together—
That would be worth a voluntary death,
Would mean to find a bliss beyond the grave
Where horror dwells: oh, may I, Mariamne,
Perhaps still hope for this, or must I fear
That you—for Antony has asked about you!

MARYMNE. One does not ask a promissory note
On deeds, much less on pain and sacrifice,
Such as despair, I feel, may bring, but which
Love never can demand!

HEROD. Farewell!
MARYMNE. Farewell!
I know you will return; for He alone
(pointing to Heaven)
Decrees that you shall die!
HEROD. So little fear?
MARYMNE. So great assurance!
HEROD. Love is ever anxious!
It trembles even in the hero's breast!
MARYMNE. Mine trembles not at all!
HEROD. You do not tremble!
MARYMNE. Now I begin! If you can trust no more
Since you contrived my brother's—Then alas
For me, and you!
HEROD. You do not give your word,
Your simple word, when I had hoped to have
A vow from you; on what shall I depend?
MARYMNE. And if I made it, what is your assurance
That I would keep it? Only I myself,
My nature as you know it. So I think,
Since you must end with hope and trust in me,
You might as well begin with both of them!
Ge! I can not do otherwise! Not yet! (exit)

SCENE 4

HEROD. Not yet! Tomorrow or some other day!—
She plans to do me favors after death!
A wife speaks so? Of course I know that often
When I had called her beautiful, she twisted
Her face awry till she no longer was,
I know she can not weep, and spasms are
For her what tears for others! I also know
She quarreled with her brother not so long
Before he met his death while in the bath
And afterwards would not be reconciled;
Yes, more than that, when he already was
A corpse, a gift was brought from him which he
Had bought for her while on his way to bathe.
Yet does a wife speak so, and at the moment
The man she loves, or surely is at least
ACT I, SCENE 5

Supposed to love — — She is not turning back,
As once, when I — — She left no scarf behind
As pretext — — No, she can endure to have
Me leave with this impression — — Very well!
To Alexandria—the grave—no matter!
But one thing first! One! Earth and Heaven listen!
You made no vow to me, but I make one
To you: I place you now beneath the sword!
If Antony puts me to death for you,—
And for your mother's sake he will not do it!—
He but deceives himself; though it is doubtful
Whether the clothes that cover me at death
Will follow to the grave, because a thief
May rob my corpse, yet you shall follow me!
That is my vow! If I do not return,
You perish! That command I leave behind!
Command! But that presents a vexing problem;
How to assure myself obedience
When I am feared no more? Oh, someone will
Be found, I think, who has good cause to be
In fear of her!

SCENE 5

SERVANT. Your brother-in-law!
HEROD. Is welcome!

That is my man! I will give him my sword
And then by working on his cowardice
Incite his courage to the point of using it!
JOSEPH (enters). I hear you think of setting out at once
For Alexandria. I wish Godspeed!
HEROD. I leave at once. May be, not to return.
JOSEPH. You fear that you will not return?
HEROD. I might not!
JOSEPH. You never talked like this before!
HEROD. Then be
Assured, things never looked so bad for me!
JOSEPH. If you are losing heart—
HEROD. But I am not,
For I shall bear whatever comes, but hope
Is gone that any good may come of it.
JOSEPH. I only wish that I had been quite blind
And never had laid bare the secret plans
Of Alexandria!
HEROD. That I can believe!
JOSEPH. For if I never had found out that she
Had had Aristobulus' portrait painted
Quite secretly for Antony, and if
I had not learned that she sent messages
To Cleopatra, and then last of all
I had not seized the coffin in the harbor,
Which hid her son and her, and stopped their flight
When it had scarce begun—

HEROD. Then she would have
Nothing to thank you for, and you could calmly
Stand by and see her daughter on the throne,
Which Mariamne, daring Maccabee,
Will surely seize if I do not return,
And if no other seizes it before her.

JOSEPH. I do not mean that. I mean, many things
Would never have been done!

HEROD. Yes, that is right!
But other things would have occurred instead.
That makes no difference—You recounted much,
One thing you have forgotten!

JOSEPH. What is that?

HEROD. You too were in the bath when he—

JOSEPH. I was!

HEROD. You wrestled with him too?

JOSEPH. At first I did.

HEROD. Well then!

JOSEPH. The dizzy spell had not yet seized him
While I was with him, if it had come on,
I would have rescued him, or else he would
Have pulled me down with him beneath the waves.

HEROD. I have no doubt of that. But you must know
That no one who was there speaks otherwise,
And since an evil chance decreed that you
Not only went into the water with him
But wrestled with him too—

JOSEPH. Why do you stop?

HEROD. My Joseph, you and I, the two of us,
We are accused!

JOSEPH. I too?

HEROD. You are not only
My brother-in-law, you are my friend as well!

JOSEPH. I hope I am!

HEROD. Oh had you never been!
Had I, like Saul, but thrown the spear at you
And you could prove it by your gaping wounds,
It would be better for you, then this slander
Would not have found a willing ear, nor would
You be beheaded for a bloody deed
You never did commit!

JOSEPH. What, I? Beheaded?

HEROD. That is your lot if I do not return
ACT I, SCENE 5

And Mariamne—

JOSEPH. I am innocent!
HEROD. What help is that? Appearances are bad!
    And even if they did believe, are not
    The many many services that you
    Have done for me, in Alexandra’s eyes
    A proof of crimes against herself, will she
    Not think: If he had let me flee, then he
    Who now lies in the grave would be alive?

JOSEPH. True! True!
HEROD. Can she not therefore with a sort
    Of right demand your life to pay for one
    That she believes she lost through act of yours,
    And will she not demand it of her daughter?

JOSEPH. Salome! This has come because I went
    To see the painter! Every year she wants
    A portrait of me!

HEROD. I know how she loves you!
JOSEPH. Ah, if she loved me less it would be better!
    Would I have found Aristobulus’ portrait,
    If I—Salome, you can now soon have
    My last one, but it will be headless!

HEROD. One must defend his head!

JOSEPH. If you admit
    Your head is lost?

HEROD. I do not quite do that,
    I still shall try to save it if I can,
    By putting it into the lion’s jaws
    Quite voluntarily.

JOSEPH. In that you once
    Succeeded when the Pharisees—

HEROD. But now
    The case is worse, whatever comes to me,
    Your fate I leave with you in your own hands;
    You always were a man, be now a king!
    I hang the purple mantle round you, extend
    To you the scepter and the sword, so hold
    Them fast and give them back to me alone!

JOSEPH. But do I hear aright?
HEROD. And to assure
    Possession of the throne and of your life,
    Kill Mariamne, if you ever hear
    That I am not returning.

JOSEPH. Mariamne?
HEROD. She is the only bond that Alexandra
    Has with the people since the river drowned
    Her son, she is the brightly colored crest
Rebellion will be sure to wear if it
Rise up against you.

JOSEPH. Yes, but Mariamne!
HEROD. You are astonished—I am not dissembling,
And my advice is good, is good for you,
What need for further words? Yet it is not
Alone for you—In plain words: I can not
Endure the thought that any other ever—
That would be bitterer than—she is proud
I know—yet after death—an Antony—
And then above all else this mother-in-law,
Who will incite the dead against the dead — —
You understand!

JOSEPH. But—
HEROD. Hear me to the end!
She let me hope that she would kill herself
With her own hand, if I—One has the right
To have a debt collected?—One may even
Use force to—What do you think?

JOSEPH. I believe so!
HEROD. Then promise me that you will kill her, should she
Not kill herself! Do not be overhasty,
But do not wait too long! So go to her
As soon as messengers, for I shall send them,
Report to you that I am dead, and tell her;
Then notice if she reaches for a dagger,
If she does something else. You promise?

JOSEPH. Yes!
HEROD. I will not have you swear an oath. There is
No need to have one swear that he will crush
A serpent that is threatening him with death.
He does it of himself, if he is sane,
Since he could leave off taking food and drink
With much less danger than omitting this.

(Joseph moves nervously)

I know you well! And I will recommend you,
Tell Antony you are the only one
Whom he may trust. That you will prove to him
By showing him that even blood relations
Are not too sacred for a sacrifice
If there is need to stop a revolution.
That is the explanation for the deed
Which you must give him. Street rioting
Will surely follow it, and you must tell him
That rioting preceded it as well,
Which only was subdued by killing her.
And as concerns the people, they will shudder
When they behold your bloody sword, and many
JOSEPH. Until we meet again! Today is not
The end! I know you will return, as always.
HEROD. A possibility, so one thing more! — — (long pause)
I swore an oath just now concerning you!
(he writes and seals)
It is recorded here! Take this sealed sheet!
You see it is addressed to—
JOSEPH. To the hangman!
HEROD. And I shall keep what I have promised in it,
If you should tell a tale about a king
Perhaps, who gave—
JOSEPH. Then give the order to me
To take this sheet myself straight to the hangman! (exit)
HEROD (alone). She lives beneath the sword, and that will spur me
To do what I have never done, to bear
What I have never borne, and comfort me
If it is all in vain. And now, away!—(exit)
ACT II

Castle Zion. Alexandra's rooms.

SCENE 1

Alexandra and Sameas.

ALEXANDRA. And now you know this!
SAMEAS. I am not surprised!

Nothing that Herod does surprises me!
For one, who as a youth declares a war
Against the Sanhedrin, with naked sword
Steps up before his judge and gives him warning
That he himself is hangman, and the hangman
Will carry out no sentence on himself,
He may as man — — Ah, I can see him yet,
How he, undaunted by the high priest, leaned
Against a column with his soldiers round him,
Those soldiers who in chasing down the robbers
Themselves had been transformed to robbers too,
And calmly counted us all, one by one,
As if he stood before a bed of thistles,
And were deciding how to clear it out.

ALEXANDRA. Yes, yes. it was a moment made for him,
On which he may quite well look back with pride!
A youthful madcap, scarcely twenty years
Of age, is summoned by the Sanhedrin,
Because, in criminal excess of spirits,
He has presumed to go against the law,
Because he dared to carry out a sentence
Of death which you had not as yet decreed.
The widow of the dead man, with a curse,
Has met him on the threshold, and within
Sit all Jerusalem's old men and gray beards.
Because he has not dressed in sackcloth, has
Not strewed his head with ashes, you lose courage.
You think no more of punishment for him,
You do not even think of threatening him,
You do not speak a word, he laughs and goes!

SAMEAS. I spoke!
ALEXANDRA. It was too late!
SAMEAS. If I had spoken
Sooner, it would have been that much too soon,
Respect for the high priest had kept me silent,
The first word was for him, for me the last,
He was the oldest there, the youngest I!

ALEXANDRA. Mere words! If then and there you Sanhedrists
Had proved the simple courage of your duty,
No greater courage would be needed now!  
But now see whether you — — Oh, you will find  
Some other good excuse, I know! If you  
Are not inclined to fight with him—in fact,  
It would be venturesome and I advise  
Against it—then you only need to fight  
With lions or with tigers when he orders.

SAMEAS. What’s that?
ALEXANDRA. You know the gladiatorial combats,  
The Roman games?
SAMEAS. Praise God, I know them not!
I think it is a gain to know what Moses  
Tells us about the Gentiles, nothing else;  
I close my eyes quite tightly every time  
A Roman soldier meets me on the street,  
And I still bless my father in his grave  
That he had never taught their tongue to me.
ALEXANDRA. You do not know they bring wild animals  
To Rome, which they have sent from Africa  
By hundreds?
SAMEAS. No, I had not heard of that.
ALEXANDRA. That in the stone arena there they drive  
Them all together, that they then send in  
Their slaves to them, who have to fight with them  
Till men or beasts are dead, while they themselves  
Sit round them in the amphitheater  
And shout with joy when mortal wounds are gaping,  
And when the bright red blood spurts on the sand?
SAMEAS. The wildest of my dreams has never shown  
Me that, and yet it fills my soul with joy  
To learn of it, it is well suited to them!  
(with hands upraised)  
Lord, Thou are great! Though Thou dost grant the Gentile  
The right to life, yet he must pay Thee tribute,  
A fearful tribute for it too, for he  
Is punished by the very way he lives it!—  
How I should like to see those games!
ALEXANDRA. Your wish  
Shall be fulfilled when Herod has returned,  
He thinks of introducing them!
SAMEAS. Oh, never!
ALEXANDRA. That’s what I said! And why not? For we have  
Lions a plenty! And the mountain herdsman  
Rejoices if their number but grows less,  
For that will save him many cows and calves.
SAMEAS. But quite aside from all the rest, where would  
He find the fighters? There are no slaves with us,  
Who owe him service even unto death.
ALEXANDRA. The first—I see before me!
SAMEAS. What?
ALEXANDRA. Of course!

You will distort your face as you do now,
Perhaps will even tightly clench your fists,
Will roll your eyes and gnash your teeth with rage
When you shall live to see the day on which
He dedicates the heathenish arena
As festively as Solomon the Temple.
All that will not escape him, as reward
He will command you by a sign to enter
And show the people there what you can do,
When you are thus confronted with a lion
That has been kept from food for many days.
For since we have no slaves, the criminals
Deserving death will have to take their place,
And who then is deserving death, if he
Is not, who openly defies the King!

SAMEAS. He could—

ALEXANDRA. Oh, do not doubt! It would be bad
If they should take his head from him too soon,
Then there would die with him such mighty plans
As even Pompey, who with impious boldness
Once dared to penetrate the Inner Temple,
Perhaps—

SAMEAS (bursting out). Oh Antony, if you destroy him,
Then for a whole year long I will not curse you,
And if you do not—well then, we are ready!

ALEXANDRA. He thinks that if our people were intended
To keep from mixing with the others, God would
Have given us the world all for ourselves!

SAMEAS. Does he think that?

ALEXANDRA. Since that is not the case,
He thinks that there is need to break the bars,
Which separate us still from all the rest,
As dykes cut stagnant pools off from the sea.
And that could happen, if we would adapt
Ourselves to them in usage and in customs.

SAMEAS. In usage—(to Heaven) Lord! If I am not to go
Completely mad, show me how he will die!
Show me the death that borrows all the horrors
From every other death, and then proclaim
To me, it is for Herod this is done!

ALEXANDRA. Then be yourself death's angel!

SAMEAS. For myself,

If not for him! I swear! I will prevent
This outrage or will punish my own weakness
And kill myself (with a motion toward his breast)
before the day arrives
Which is besmirched by such abomination!
That oath compels me to commit a crime
If I can not perform heroic deeds;
What man is there who ever swore a greater?
ALEXANDRA. Good! But do not forget, if your own arm's
Not strong enough to overcome the foe,
Do not reject with scorn the arms of others!
SAMEAS. These others?
ALEXANDRA. You can arm them easily!
SAMEAS. Explain your words!
ALEXANDRA. Who gave the royal crown
To Herod?
SAMEAS. Antony! Who else than he?
ALEXANDRA. Why did he do that?
SAMEAS. Because he liked him!
Or merely this, because we did not like him!
When has a Gentile had a better reason?
ALEXANDRA. Another thing! What keeps him on the throne?
SAMEAS. The people's blessing, no! Perhaps its curse!
Well, who can say?
ALEXANDRA. Why I! The trick alone
Of sending in the tribute we must pay
The Romans every year, before it's due,
And even freely doubling it unasked,
If somewhere a new war has broken out.
The Roman wants our money, nothing more,
He lets us keep our ancient faith, our God,
And he would even honor Him with us,
Grant Him that place upon the Capitol
Beside his Jupiter and Ops and Isis,
Which is unoccupied until today,
If He, like them, were only made of stone.
SAMEAS. If that is so, and I regret to say
It is, what do you hope from Antony?
In this respect, as you yourself have said,
There's nothing Herod leaves undone. Just now—
I saw him go! The back of one mule broke
Before it even reached the city gate!
For every drop of blood within his veins
He offers him an ounce of gold; do you
Believe he will reject the gold for you?
ALEXANDRA. Of course not, if I acted for myself!
But Cleopatra works in my behalf
And Mariamne helps me too, I hope.
You are surprised? I do not mean in person,
She is more apt herself to work against me,
But through her portrait, and not even that,
No, through another which resembles her.  
For as the forest shelters not alone 
The lion but his foe the tiger too, 
There nestles also in this Roman's heart 
A swarming serpent-brood of fiery passions 
Which struggle with each other for control, 
And if now Herod builds upon the first, 
Then I build on the second, and I think 
The second one is stronger than the first.

SAMEAS. You are—
ALEXANDRA. No Hyrcanus, although his daughter! 
But lest you should misjudge what I have done, 
Know this: I am no Mariamne either! 
If Antony destroys the husband, who 
Possesses her, to clear the way to her: 
She still is mistress of herself and can 
Entrench herself behind her widow's veil. 
But I am certain of one thing: already 
His hand is on his sword, and if he has 
Not drawn it, only this consideration 
Has really held him back: the Romans think 
This lucky soldier Herod is the ring 
Of iron holding things together here. 
Just bring the proof the opposite is true, 
Stir up revolt, disturb this lazy peace, 
Then he will draw it!

SAMEAS. That will be quite easy! 
In thought the people have already slain him 
And it is said—
ALEXANDRA. So put your seal upon it, 
And quickly then disclose his testament! 
You know its contents now, the Roman games 
Stand first in it, and if each one believes 
He will receive a hundred lashes less 
By Herod's death, or miss the martyr's cross, 
Then each one thinks, what he is right in thinking. 
For Israel is facing things so terrible, 
That it may force from many hearts the wish 
Of utter desperation, that the Red Sea 
Had swallowed all the people, all twelve tribes 
Of Israel, and Moses first of all.

SAMEAS. I go! Before the noontide comes—
ALEXANDRA. I know 
What you can do when you put sackcloth on 
And, shouting woe! alas! move through the streets 
As if your forebear Jonah were among us. 
And you will learn that it is very useful 
To go sometimes to see the fisherman,
ACT II, SCENE 2

And eat that humble tradesman's food that he
Permits himself because no one has bought it.
SAMEAS. And you yourself will learn, we Pharisees
Have not forgotten the disgrace we suffered,
As you seem to believe. So listen now
To something you were not supposed to learn
Until it happened: we are sworn long since
Against him, all Judea's undermined
And in Jerusalem, so you will see
How firmly we can count upon the people,
There even is a blind man in our league.
ALEXANDRA. What use is he?
SAMEAS. Why none! And that he knows!
But yet he is so filled with hate and anger,
That he would rather share the undertaking
With us and die, than still continue living
In such a world, if it should not succeed.
I think we may consider this a sign. (exit)

SCENE 2

ALEXANDRA (alone). In thought the people have already slain him!
I know! I know! And I can see by that
How much they wish he never will return.
How fortunate that as he left the swarm
Of locusts hid him from our sight, for that's
An omen that they do not wish in vain.
And it is possible that even now
He is beheaded.—No, speak as you think,
No Pharisee is lurking at the door!
And Antony is Antony, I know,
He is a Roman too, and Romans form
Their judgments slowly, execute them swiftly.
He may now be a prisoner, although
Not yet in prison! If one uses that,
It can lead further. Therefore it is good
If insurrection comes, although I know
What insurrection means, no less I know
What consequences it will have if he
Returns in spite of all. If! That can happen,
So weigh it well! Before he left, he sent
A severed head as parting gift to you.
That shows—Fie! I am talking like my father!
That shows me he is swift as tyrants are,
And also that he aims to frighten me.
The first I knew long since, the other shall not
Succeed! And if the very worst should come,
If everything I try should fail, if he
Should dare the worst in spite of his strong love
For Mariamne, which will rather mount
Than fall, and will protect me if she will—
What of it? I have ventured all for vengeance,
In death it would be vengeance still, on him
Who did it and on her who let it happen.
The people, even Rome itself, would not
Look on at it with patience. As for me,
I should be better suited to my forebears
If death for me should be a bloody one!
Did not the great-grandfathers of my race,
The great-grandmothers too, did not the most
Of them go to the grave without their heads
Because they would not bow them? I should share
Their lot with them, what more then would it be?

SCENE 3

Mariamne enters.

ALEXANDRA (aside).
She comes! Yes, if she could be turned from him
And could be moved to follow me to Rome,
Then—But, she hates him and she loves him too!
Shall I still dare a last attack? So be it!

(she hastens up to Mariamne)

You seek for comfort where it can be found!
Come to my heart!

MARIAMNE. Comfort?

ALEXANDRA. You feel no need?
I have misjudged you then! But I had reasons
For thinking you the sort of wife you are not,
And what I heard was slander!

MARIAMNE. What you heard?

ALEXANDRA. They told me of embraces and of kisses
You gave your fratricidal husband right
After the murder—Do forgive, I should
Not have believed it.

MARIAMNE. No?

ALEXANDRA. No, never, never!
For more than one good reason! Even if
You could have turned so heartlessly aside,
Refused to give your brother's bloody shade
A sister's offering of revenge, which you
Could take, not by a Judith's sword, nor yet
By Rahab's nail, but merely by a twist
Of lip or silent crossing of your arms,
And should have taken for the dead man's sake:
The murderer himself would not have dared
ACT II, SCENE 3

Approach, for you resemble so the dead man,
You would have seemed to him too like the corpse,
Aristobulus' corpse, made up with rouge.
He would have turned away from you and shuddered.

MARIAMNE. He did not do the one, nor I the other!
ALEXANDRA. Then be—But no! Perhaps some doubt remained
As to his guilt. Do you want proof of it?
MARIAMNE. I need no proof!
ALEXANDRA. You—
MARIAMNE. It is not important!
ALEXANDRA. Then—But I hold the curse back even now,
For you are laden with another one!
You still are bound in fetters by a love
Which never brought you honor.

MARIAMNE. But I thought,
I did not choose my husband for myself,
I but submitted to the lot which you
And Hyrcanus deliberately imposed
On me, the grandchild and the daughter.

ALEXANDRA. Not I
But my faint-hearted father planned the marriage.

MARIAMNE. Then what he did displeased you?
ALEXANDRA. No, it did not!
For then I would have fled with you before—
A refuge had been offered me in Egypt.
I only say that he evolved the plan,
The first of all our high priests lacking courage;
I merely fought the feeling of aversion
With which I heard the plan at first. But still
I did it, for I liked the coward's deal
On second thought, and gave the pearl of Zion
For Edom's sword, when he insisted on it!
Yes, if the serpent had been poisonous
That at the time had bitten Cleopatra,
Or if Mark Antony, when on his journey,
Had only come this way, why then I would
Have answered no! As 'twas, I answered yes!

MARIAMNE. And yet—
ALEXANDRA. I had expected that you would
Not merely waste the purchase price, I hoped
That you would ask of Herod—
MARIAMNE. Oh, I know!
I should have made him pay for every kiss
By granting me a head that you disliked,
And finally when no one more defied you
Save only he himself, have driven him
To suicide, or if that did not work,
On some still night I should have craftily
Repeated Judith's sneaking deed on him;
That would have made you proud to call me daughter!
ALEXANDRA. Much prouder, I do not deny, than now.
MARIAMNE. But I preferred to be a wife to him
To whom you married me, for love of him
Forget I was a Maccabee, as he
Forget that he was king for love of me.
ALEXANDRA. In Jericho, however, you again
Remembered it, or so it seemed, at least
You were the first who openly accused him
While I myself held back with my complaint,
To test you. Am I right?
MARIAMNE. In Jericho
The terrible event confused me so,
It came too suddenly, from meal to bath,
From bath to grave, a brother, I admit
My brain reeled! If, however, stubborn and
Suspicous, I closed my door to king and husband,
I'm sorry now and can forgive myself
Only because it happened as in fever!
ALEXANDRA. In fever!
MARIAMNE (half to herself). I would not have done it either
If he had not worn mourning when he came!
In red, in deep dark red, I could have seen him,
But—
ALEXANDRA. Yes, he found it quickly! He had ordered
It in advance, as other murderers
Draw water, possibly, before they murder—
MARIAMNE. Mother, do not forget!
ALEXANDRA. What? That you are
The murderer's wife? That's something you've become,
And only are as long as you desire,
Perhaps right now, who knows! you're that no longer;
But yet you always were the dead man's sister
And that you will remain, you even still
Will be, if you—you seem inclined to do it—
Should shout into his grave: It serves you right!
MARIAMNE. I owe respect to you, I should not like
To do it violence and, therefore, stop!
For otherwise I could—
ALEXANDRA. What?
MARIAMNE. Ask myself
Who is more guilty of it, whether it's
The man who did the deed because he had to
Or she who drove him to it! Let the dead rest!
ALEXANDRA. Then speak to one who did not give him birth!
I carried him beneath my heart, and must
Avenge him, since I can not waken him,
That he avenge himself!

_MARIAMNE._ Avenge him then, Avenge him on yourself! You know full well That as high priest, surrounded and acclaimed So by the mob, his head turned by the honor, Not as the heedless youth Aristobulus, He brought upon himself the thing that happened. Now tell me who it was that stirred him up And made him lose his self-complacency!

He had no lack of gaily colored clothes, That so attract the eyes of pretty girls, He had no need of more to make him happy. What need had he of Aaron's priestly mantle, Which you draped round him as an added glory? He had himself no other thought about it Than this: Is it becoming to me? Others, However, from the moment that he donned it, Thought him the second head of Israel And you soon managed so to turn his head He thought himself the first and only one!

_ALEXANDRA._ You slander him and me.

_MARIAMNE._ Oh no, I do not! If this gay youth who seemed to have been born To be the first completely happy person, If he so quickly met a gloomy fate, And if the man who makes all other men Rank cowards if he draws his sword, if he— I do not know he did it, but I fear it; Then lust for power and ambition are To blame, not the ambition of the dead man And not the lust for power of the King! To lay the blame on you would not be seemly; I do not ask that you should shed a single Repentant tear because you sent a ghost, A bloody ghost, into our wedding chamber, Although we two no longer are alone, And now the third disturbs my mind so much That I am silent when I ought to speak And speak when it were better to be silent. I will not even try to quench your zeal For vengeance, will not ask what you avenge, Whether it is your plans or is your son: Do what you will, go on, or call a halt, But be assured that if you strike at Herod You strike at Mariamne too; the oath That I refused, when he demanded it On parting, I will swear it now: I die, If he should die. So act and say no more!
HEROD AND MARIAMNE

ALEXANDRA. Then die! And now! For—

MARIAMNE. Oh, I understand you!

And that is why you thought I needed comfort?
Oh no! You're wrong! I do not feel alarm
If menial mobs, which only tolerate
The chosen few because they're human, mortal,
Already have put him to death with words.
What else is there a slave can do, whence'er
A king goes by in regal pomp and splendor,
Than say: His turn will surely come, like mine!
I do not grudge him that! and if he moves
A battlefield with many graves up close
Beside the throne, I quite approve of that,
It stifles envy! Yet my heart tells me
That Herod lives and will live. Death must cast
A shadow, it falls here, inside!

SCENE 4

SERVANT. The Viceroy!

ALEXANDRA. And surely armed, just as he always is,
Whenever he comes to see us, since he failed
to dupe us by the use of flattery,
As seemed to be his aim when first he came.
Do you know that Salome almost died
Of jealousy of you?

MARIAMNE. She still is jealous!
For constantly, when she is near, I tell him
The worst things, smiling intimately,
And since she never wearies of her spying,
I do not weary either, plagueing her
Because she is so foolish!

Joseph enters.

ALEXANDRA (pointing to his weapons). See!

MARIAMNE. Oh let him!

His wife demands it so that she can dream
She has a valiant and courageous husband.

ALEXANDRA (to Joseph).

I am still here, you see!

JOSEPH. A strange reception!

ALEXANDRA. My son is still here too! He has again
Concealed himself within a dead man's coffin.
If you will drive him forth, I will forgive you
For having done it once before unbidden.
But this time you must seek the coffin, not
On any ship that sails the sea to Egypt,
But deep within the bowels of the earth!

JOSEPH. I am not one who can awake the dead!
ALEXANDRA (scornfully to Mariamne).

How true! For then you would have gone to Egypt
To help your master when he kneels and pleads
And that does not protect him from the axe—
MARIAMNE. He kneel and plead!
J O S E P H (to Mariamne). And I can show you how!

"I am accused of this!" Yes, I admit it.
"But not of this!" I add it right at once
So that you know it all! He'll do it so.
A L E X A N D R A. You boast for him?
J O S E P H. He did that once before!

I stood beside him, when the Pharisees
Had planned to file a charge with Antony.
1135
He hastened on to camp ahead of them
Just as he was, told it himself instead,
And when they came, repeating all the charge,
Enlarging point by point, he said: Now speak!
Have I omitted anything or not?
You know the end, how many an accuser
Then lost his stubborn head for not retracting;
He had the Roman's favor when he left.
A L E X A N D R A. The two were younger then than they are now.
The arrogance of Herod pleased the other,
And all the more, since others bore the cost
Not he himself. The Pharisee whose tongue
Is always preaching of revolt 'gainst Rome,
Can he be anything? Whoever plucks
His beard for him, reduces his esteem!
1150
Thus Antony did think and laugh, I doubt
That he will let that happen to himself!
J O S E P H. You speak as if you wished—
A L E X A N D R A. Whether we wish
Alike or not is no concern of yours!
Hold your wish fast! For you it is important
That he return!
J O S E P H. You think so? If for me,
Then too for you!
A L E X A N D R A. I know no reason why!
There was an Alexandra once before
Who came to wear a crown in Israel,
Who seized it when no king was wearing it
And did not leave it for a thief to steal.
By God, there soon shall be a second one
If there are really (to Mariamne) Maccabean women
Who keep their childish oaths!
J O S E P H (listening). Yes, it is true!

There really was once such an Alexandra,
But if one will attain her goal, he'll have
To follow her example to the full,
Not merely half. She reconciled herself
With all her foes when once she took the throne,
Now no one feared her more but only hoped,
No wonder that she sat secure till death!

MARIAMNE. That is deplorable! Why have a scepter,
If not to satisfy both love and hate?
A twig's enough to scare away the flies!

JOSEPH. How true! (to Alexandra) And you?

ALEXANDRA. She never saw in dreams
The father of her race, the mighty Judas,
Else she would not have feared a single foe,
For even from the grave he guards his children,
Because he cannot die in any heart.
How should he die! No one can ever pray,
Who does not have to say: It's due to him
That I may kneel before my God and not
Before a god of wood or stone or bronze!

JOSEPH (aside). The King was right! I must commit the deed,
Put both to death or suffer death myself.
I have to put the crown upon my head
If I would save it from the hangman's axe.
A world of hate stares at me here! So be it!
They have pronounced the sentence on themselves;
Now for the last time I have tested them,
And if his messenger were here, I would
This very moment do it without mercy!
My preparations are already made.

SCENE 5

SERVANT. The Captain Titus asks an audience!

JOSEPH. At once. (He is about to go)

ALEXANDRA. And why not here?

SERVANT. He's here already!

TITUS (enters; secretly to Joseph).

The thing you feared is happening, the people
Are in revolt!

JOSEPH. Then do what I commanded,
Draw up your cohorts and advance at once!

TITUS. That is already done. I come to ask:
Do you want prisoners or only dead men?
My eagle merely seizes, or it mangles,
And you must know which method suits you better.

JOSEPH. No blood must flow!

TITUS. Good! I shall then move in
Before the stoning starts, but otherwise
I should delay!
ACT II, SCENE 5

JOSEPH. Did you see Sameas?

TITUS. The Pharisee who one time almost crashed
His head against my shield because he shuts
His eyes each time he catches sight of me?
I saw him, to be sure!

JOSEPH. And how? Speak loudly!

TITUS. With thousands round him in the open market
And loudly cursing Herod!

JOSEPH (to Alexandra). Sameas
Just left you! It was not an hour ago!

ALEXANDRA. You saw?

TITUS (to Joseph). You'll come yourself?

JOSEPH. When I can!

And in the meantime—

TITUS. I am leaving! (turns to go)

ALEXANDRA (calls him back). Captain!

Why did you take away our guard?

MARIAMNE. The guard
Has gone?

ALEXANDRA. Yes, yesterday!

JOSEPH. I ordered it!

TITUS. Because the King told me before he went:
This is the man who knows just what I want,
What he commands, that I command myself! (exit)

ALEXANDRA (to Joseph).
And you!

JOSEPH. I thought that Judas Maccabaeus
Was guard enough for you and for your daughter.
And furthermore you hear how things are going:
I need the soldiers elsewhere! (aside) If the Romans
Were near, it might not be successful! Today
I sent the Galileans!

ALEXANDRA (to Mariamne). Do you still
Think my suspicion false?

MARIAMNE. I do not know,
But it infects me now. I find this strange!
Although—If spears came flying from the wall
They would not come more unexpectedly!

ALEXANDRA. Two dagger thrusts would clear the way for him;
For if there are no Maccabees alive,
Then the Herodians will claim the throne.

MARIAMNE. I should still laugh at you, were only
Salome not his wife!—But by my brother,
Her head is mine! And I will say to Herod:
As you give me revenge on her, just so
You love me! For it must be she, not he!

ALEXANDRA. Do not rejoice too soon! First we must act,
And this revolt can serve our purpose well!
MARIAMNE. I will not be involved in this revolt,
   Because, if Herod does return, I have
   Nothing to fear, and if he does not come,
   Then I will welcome death in any form!
ALEXANDRA. I'm going! (starts to leave)
JOSEPH (stepping in her way). Where?
ALEXANDRA. Up to the parapet
   For now, and after that where I may please!
JOSEPH. The way up to the parapet is open!
ALEXANDRA. So we are prisoners?
JOSEPH. Until the time when peace has been restored,
   I must request you—
ALEXANDRA. Are you not presuming?
JOSEPH. A stone is blind, a Roman javelin too,
   They both may hit what they are not supposed to,
   So one must keep out of the way of them!
ALEXANDRA (to Mariamne).
   Then I shall go and try to tell my friends
   Somehow by signs how matters stand with us.
MARIAMNE. By signs—your friends—oh mother, mother! So
   It really is yourself and not the people?
   I hope you are not digging your own grave!
   (Alexandra starts to go)
JOSEPH. With your permission I shall send along
   My man-at-arms. Philo!
ALEXANDRA. Open war then?
   (Philo enters; Joseph speaks to him in low tones, then aloud)
JOSEPH. You understand?
PHILO. Yes!
JOSEPH. As a last resort!
PHILO. I am to watch, and then—
JOSEPH. (aside) It seems that Herod's spirit is within me!
ALEXANDRA (aside). But yet I go! Perhaps this man-at-arms,
   Although a Galilean, may be won!
   I can but try! (exit; Philo follows her)
JOSEPH (aside). There is no other way
   However much it throws suspicion on me,
   For the revolt drives me to take this step,
   I do not dare lose sight of her, unless
   I want to make the deed impossible;
   His messenger may come at any hour!
   I gave up long ago expecting Herod.
MARIAMNE. And when did Herod die?
JOSEPH. When did he die?
MARIAMNE. And how? You ought to know, you risk so much!
JOSEPH. What am I risking then? You ask a riddle!
MARIAMNE. Nothing, if you believe I shall not find
Protection when the Romans hear my life
Is threatened, everything if you are wrong.
JOSEPH. And who is threatening your life?
MARIAMNE. You ask?
JOSEPH. I?
MARIAMNE. And can you swear the opposite?
   By your child’s head! Well, can you?—You are silent!
JOSEPH. You have no right to ask an oath of me.
MARIAMNE. One so accused denies it of himself.
   Alas for you if Herod now returns!
   Two things I have to say before I kiss him,
      The one is, that you planned to murder me,
      The other, what I swore; now judge yourself
      What fate is waiting for you when he comes!
JOSEPH. What did you swear? If it shall frighten me,
   Then I must know it.
MARIAMNE. Let it be your curse!
   That I will kill myself with my own hand
   If he—Ah! Now you think: Had I but known that!
      Why then I should have paid no heed at all
      To a cold greeting, should have gone ahead
      As I began and now all would be well!—
      You were a very different man at first!
JOSEPH. I have no thing to fear!
MARIAMNE. Because you think
   It is impossible that he return!
   Who knows! And if! Then I shall keep my oath,
      But not until I am avenged on you,
      Till I have so avenged myself—yes, tremble—
      As he would have avenged me! Draw your sword
      At once! Draw it! You dare not? I believe it!
      However you may guard me, I shall find
      A way to Captain Titus I am sure!
   Your game is lost, since I have found it out.
JOSEPH (aside). True!
   (to Mariamne) I shall hold you to your word! You will
   Avenge yourself as Herod would avenge you!
   You have vowed that to me! Do not forget it!
MARIAMNE. Thus madness speaks! That Herod loves me
   Far more than I can love myself, no one
      Will doubt, Salome even will not doubt it,
      That tricky wife of yours, not even if
      She hate me doubly for it, even if
      She be the one who for revenge has put
      The ugly thought of murder in your head!
      That the idea comes from her, I know,
And I will smite her so it hurts, her grief
For you shall be my last real joy on earth!

JOSEPH. Though wrong, it matters not! I have your word!

MARIAMNE. You keep repeating it? Accursed man,
What fearful turmoil of dark thoughts you wake
In me, and what suspicions in my breast!
You speak as if King Herod had himself
Picked you as sacrificial priest and me
As victim. Is it so? As he took leave
He dropped a vague dark hint, I think of it
With horror. Answer!

JOSEPH. I shall answer you
As soon as necessary, when I know
That he—

MARIAMNE. No longer can expose your lies,
When you with evil cowardice accuse him
Of the most terrible and monstrous thing
Only to clear yourself from my suspicions?
I tell you, I will hear you only now,
When he, perhaps before you even finish,
May enter at the door and strike you down!
Keep silent then forever, or speak now!

JOSEPH. And if it were? I do not say it is!
But if it were? What else then would it be
Than confirmation of the things you feel,
Than proof that he loves you, as no man yet
Has ever loved his wife?

MARIAMNE. What did you say?
It seems to me I heard that once before!

JOSEPH. I thought that it would only flatter you
If death were not one half as bitter for him
As is the thought of leaving—

MARIAMNE. What the wager,
That I myself can finish that for you!
As is the thought of leaving me behind
Within a world where Antony still lives!

JOSEPH. Well, yes! I do not say that he said that—

MARIAMNE. He said it! He said— Oh, what did he not say!
If he would only come!

JOSEPH. But Mariamne!—
(aside) I have become entangled! Yet I did
No more than what I had to! But I fear
That he—I see the dead Aristobulus.
Accursed be the deed that throws a shadow
Before it's even done!

MARIAMNE. So it was more
Than merely empty bubbles in my brain,
As may sometimes develop and then burst,
It was—My life is only now beginning,
Until today I dreamed!

SCENE 6

A servant enters, Salome follows.

Salome (to the servant). Were you commanded
To let no person enter unannounced?
I take the blame!

Joseph. Salome, you?

Salome. Who else?

No evil spirit, only your poor wife,
Whom you once wooed as Jacob wooed his Rachel
And whom you now—(to Mariamne) Accursed woman, was
It not enough to turn my brother's heart
Away from me? Do you now have to steal
My husband from me too? Both day and night
He thinks of you, as if you were a widow,
And I still less than that! By day he dogs
Your footsteps everywhere! By night he dreams
Of you, and anxiously calls out your name,
He starts up out of sleep—(to Joseph) Did I not charge you
With that this very morning? Even today
When all Jerusalem is in revolt,
Today he's not with me, nor in the market
Where I had sent because he did not come,
He is with you, and you—you you are alone!

Mariamne. It surely is not she. So it is he!
If any doubt were still remaining, then
This silly jealousy has stifled it!—
For him I was a thing and nothing more!

Joseph (to Salome).

I swear—

Salome. That I am blind? Oh no! I see!

Mariamne. The dying man who would cut down his fig tree
Because he could not bear to have another
Enjoy its fruit when he himself was dead,
He would be culpable, and yet perhaps
He had set out the tree himself and knew
That it would give refreshment to the thief
Or even to the murderer who shook it.
In my case that's not so! And yet! And yet!
That is a crime whose like there never was.

Salome (still speaking to Joseph).

You speak in vain! Commission! What commission?

Mariamne. Commission! That the seal!—If it could be,
Then now's the time it would be possible!
But it's not possible! However great
HEROD AND MARIAMNE

The turmoil in my breast, my soul is still
Unsullied by a single base emotion!
This moment I would give to Antony
The selfsame answer that I would have given
Him on our wedding day, I feel that, so it
Affects me as it does. Were that not so,
Then I would have to bear it, yes, forgive it!

SALOME (to MARIAMNE).
You do not seem to see me here!

MARIAMNE. I do!
And what is more, you have done me a favor,
The greatest favor, I was blind and now
I see, see clearly, and alone through you!

SALOME. You scoff at me? You shall do penance for it,
If only Herod will return! I will
Tell everything to him—

MARIAMNE. What? Oh yes! Do that!
If he gives ear — — Why not? Why do I laugh?
Is that impossible? — — And if he listens,
You have my word, I will not contradict you!
I do not love myself enough for that!

SCENE 7

ALEXANDRA (rushes in). The King!

JOSEPH. In town?

ALEXANDRA. Already in the castle!
ACT III

Castle Zion. Alexandra's rooms.

SCENE 1


Herod enters with his retinue. Soemus.

HEROD. Well, here I am! (to Soemus) Is it still bleeding? The stone
Was meant for me, and you were only struck
Because you came just then to tell me something.
And so this time your head was your king's shield!
If you had only stayed back where you were—

SOEMUS. I would not have the wound, nor credit either,
If credit be deserved. In Galilee
That man at most is stoned who dares oppose
Both you and me, for I am but your shadow,
Or better still your mouthpiece or whatever
You will.

HEROD. Yes they are very loyal there,
At least to their own interests, and to mine
Because their own go hand in hand with mine.

SOEMUS. How much they do is shown you by the fact
That you have found me in your capital.

HEROD. In fact, I was surprised to find you here;
For when the king is gone, there is more need
Of watchers in the restive provinces!
What was it then that drove you from your post?
It certainly can not have been the wish
To prove to me it was not dangerous
To leave it, nor was it the premonition
That there would be a stone to intercept!

SOEMUS. I came to town in all due haste to see
The Viceroy and disclose direct to him
A few peculiar facts I have discovered.
I wanted to report to him, that even
In Galilee the Pharisees are trying,
Without success, to undermine the ground;
And yet my warning came too late, I found
Jerusalem in flames and I could only
Help him to put them out!

HEROD (shakes hands with him). And that you did
With your own blood!—Ah, Joseph, greetings to you!
I thought to find you elsewhere!—Never mind!
But go at once and bring me Sameas,
The Pharisee, whom the Roman Captain Titus
Is holding captive as the Scythians do.
The stubborn Roman has been hauling him
Around with him behind the horse he rides,  
Tied to its tail; in his fanatic zeal  
He spit at him upon the open square.  
And so he has to run, as he perhaps  
Has never run before, to keep from falling  
And being dragged along. I should at once  
Have turned him loose as I was riding by!  
My thanks are surely due to him alone  
That now I know who all the serpents are  
Who hitherto have crawled away unseen!  
I now can crush them easily at will! (exit Joseph)  

HEROD (to Alexandra). I greet you too! And from Mark Antony  
I bring a message to you that you can  
Not hale a river into court, much less  
A king within whose land the river flows,  
Because he did not fill it up with earth!  
(to Soemus) I would have been here long ago, but friends  
Who do not often see each other, find it hard  
To bring themselves to part! And it will be  
That way with us, I tell you in advance,  
Now that I have you here again at last.  
You must be here to help me feast on figs  
As I helped Antony consume the morays,  
Delicious smothered in Falernian wine,  
A gourmand's dish! He had me tell him tales  
About our younger days just to refresh  
His memory! So you must be prepared  
To do the same for me. Though I have not  
So much of the triumphant victor in me,  
That I would ever summon you to me  
As he had summoned me to him, pretending  
That he believed such an absurd complaint,  
With knitted brows like Caesar, armed as well  
With lightning and with thunderbolt  
To make quite sure that I should really come—  
That was the only reason why he did it—  
Yet I shall take advantage of the chance  
Which brings you to Jerusalem today  
And say, as he, when you begin to talk  
About your duty: If you do it, as  
You should, it will not need you every moment!  
You come so rarely that it seems you do  
Not like to come!  

SOEMUS. You do me wrong, and yet  
I have good reason not to come too often!  

HEROD (to Salome). Are you here too? So have you learned at last,  
When you meet Mariamne, to imagine  
That you are only looking in a mirror
And what you see there is your own reflection?
I often gave that good advice to you
When you were piqued at her,—you never took it!
Now do not take the joke amiss and spoil
The joy of our reunion! But, where is she?
They told me I would find her with her mother,
So I came here!

She went when she was told
That you were coming!

Went? Impossible?
And yet, perhaps! Since it would be more fitting
To meet alone!—(aside) Do you feel anger, heart,
Instead of asking pardon?—She is right,
I'll follow her!

That's right, deceive yourself,
Explain her fear at seeing you alive,
Her shame for having thought you dead, and more
Because she knows she is no longer widow,
Explain it all as but a maiden's shyness,
A maiden who has never known a man,
Not the confusion of a sinful woman!
She left because of fear!—

Of fear?—Look round you,
We are not here alone!

That suits me well,
If I accuse when witnesses are present,
Then my complaint will be more surely heard,
And will be harder to suppress!

You place
Yourself between my wife and me? Take care,
You might be crushed!

This time I shall not be,
Although I know how much a sister counts
With you, when it involves this Maccabee,
This time—

I have one thing to say! The day
On which I saw her first, if on that day
Someone had entered a complaint against her
He would not easily have found a hearing,
But easier still than now! Be warned by that!
I owe so much to her that she can not
Owe anything to me! I feel it deeply!

She has full freedom then?

To wear what mask
She will to aid her in deceiving you,
If she finds joy in making sport of you.

Then—then I must keep still. Words would be vain!
Whatever I might say to you, you always
HEROD AND MARIAMNE

Would have your answer ready: Mummery!
This mummery has had a fair success,
It fooled not me alone, it has deceived
The world as well and it costs you your honor
And me my peace of mind, though you may swear
That Joseph only did what was his duty
When he—but see if any man believes you!

HEROD. When he—what is it you withhold? Go on!
But no — not yet! (to a servant) A message for the Queen.
I ask her presence here!—Does it not seem
As if the whole wide world were free of spiders
And all of them were nesting in my house,
And when for once the blue of heaven seems
To shine for me they start to spin their webs
And hide it as with clouds? In fact—it's strange
She does not come. She really should have kissed me,
Succumbing to the impulse of the moment,
And then have bit her lips in her distress
If after all the ghost had not yet gone!
(to Salome)
You know what you have ventured? Woman, you know?
I was so happy! Understand? And now—
The earth once spilled a glass of wine for me
When I was thirsty, for it started quaking
When I had not yet finished drinking it;
That I forgave because I had to. But now—
On you I could take vengeance!

SCENE 2
Mariamne enters.

HEROD. Cast yourself

Down at the feet of her you openly
Insulted, then I will not!

SALOME. Ha!

ALEXANDRA (aside). That means?

HEROD. Well, Mariamne?

MARIAMNE. What does the King command?

I have been summoned and I have appeared.

ALEXANDRA (aside). Is this the wife who swore to kill herself,
If he did not return?

HEROD. Is this your greeting?

MARIAMNE. The King has sent for me to give him greeting,
I give him greeting! Thus the task is done!

ALEXANDRA. How wrong! You stand arraigned before a court.

HEROD. There was a charge about to be preferred
Against you! So I sent for you to come
Before I heard it, but it truly was not
ACT III, SCENE 2

So that you might defend yourself against it,
Only because I think it will be stifled
Quite of itself if you are present here!

MARIAMNE. To hinder that I ought to go again!
HEROD. But Mariamne? Never were you one
Of those so wretched pitiable souls
Who, even as they see the face or back
Of foe, forgive and are once more disgruntled
Because they are too weak for honest hate,
Too small to be completely generous.
What then has so transformed your very soul
That now you seem to be as one of them?
Before I left, you gave me a farewell.
This led me to expect a welcome from you,
Do you refuse me that? You stand there now
As if the hills and plains that lay so long
Between us still were separating us?
And you step back when I come closer to you?
Is my return so hateful to you then?

MARIAMNE. Why should it be? It gives me back my life!
HEROD. Gives back your life! Ah! What a word that is!
MARIAMNE. But you will not deny you understand me!
HEROD. (aside). Can she then know it? (to Mariamne) Come!
(to Alexandra) Pardon!
ALEXANDRA. Of course!
(exit; all the others follow her)

MARIAMNE. The coward!
HEROD. Coward?
MARIAMNE. And—
HEROD. And?—(aside) That would be dreadful!
For never could I blot it out in her!
MARIAMNE. Whether his wife shall follow him in death
By her own choice, or hangman strike her down—
It matters not if she but dies! He leaves
No time for her to sacrifice herself!
HEROD. She knows!
MARIAMNE. Is Antony a man, as I
Believed till now, a man like you, or is he
A daemon as you must believe, since you
Do seem to doubt there is a sense of duty
Or remnant of a pride within my bosom
That would resist, if dripping with your blood
He came as suitor for my hand and urged me
To help him while away such leisure time
As the Egyptian may perchance leave free?
HEROD (aside).
But how? But how?

MARIAMNE. He would of course have had to
Put you to death before he could woo me,
And if you feel yourself so valueless,
I never would have thought it but I see it,
That you are fearful, lest the very fullness
Of manly worth in you would not outweigh him
In your wife's heart, yet by what right do you
Believe I am so low, that you should fear
That I would not repulse the murderer?
Oh double shame!

HEROD (breaking out). What was the price you paid
To get this secret? For it was not cheap!
A head was my security!

MARIAMNE. Salome,
How well you knew your brother!—Ask the man
From whom I learned of it what he received,
No further answer will you get from me! (turns away)

HEROD. I'll show you now just how I question him!

SCENE 3

Soemus enters.

HEROD. Is my brother Joseph there?

SOEMUS. He waits with Sameas.

HEROD. Take him away!
I gave a note to him. Tell him he shall
Deliver it at once! Accompany him
And see that everything that it commands
Is faithfully performed!

SOEMUS. It shall be done! (exit)

HEROD. Whatever you suspect, or think, or know,
You still misjudge me!

MARIAMNE. On my brother's murder
You put the seal of real necessity
And one must bow to that, however much
One shudders, but you never will succeed
In stamping any plan to murder me
With this same seal, it will remain just what
It is, a crime one can at most repeat
But neither now nor ever can surpass!

HEROD. I would not have the courage to reply
If I, however much I might have risked,
Had not been sure of what the end would be.
But sure I was, and I was only sure
Because I staked my all upon the play!
I did that which the soldier well may do
In battle sometimes as a last resort,
He hurl the standard from him which he carries,
Upon which fortune, honor, both depend,
Right in the midst of milling foe he hurst it,
But not because he thinks to let it go:
He plunges after it, he brings it back
And brings the laurel too, though sadly torn,
The wreath of victory, which even courage
No longer could attain but only desperation.
You called me coward. If a man is that
Who feels a demon in himself and fears it,
Then sometimes I am cowardly, but only
When I must reach my goal by devious paths,
That I am not the man I really am.
Then I am fearful I might show myself
Too soon, and so to tame my pride,
Which easily aroused might spur me on,
I fix on something which is more than I,
On something which must stand or fall with me.
You know what stood before me when I left?
No duel and still less a court of justice,
But a capricious tyrant, in whose presence
I was supposed to hold myself in check
But surely would not if—I thought of you,
And did not even grind my teeth—however
He might offend the man and king in me
While dragging me from feast to feast, and yet
So strangely silent, putting off the pardon;
As patient as a slave I bore it all!

MARIAMNE. You speak in vain! In me you have offended
Humanity; all who like me are human
Must share my pain. One need not be my kin,
One does not need to be like me a woman.
When you by secret underhanded murder
Did rob me of my brother, only those
With brothers could weep with me. All the others
Could stand aloof, refusing sympathy,
Dry-eyed. But everyone who breathes has life,
And no one willingly lets life be taken
From him save by the hand of God alone,
Who gave it to him! Such a monstrous crime
The whole wide human race condemns and hates,
The fates condemn, who, though they let it start,
Can not permit completion, you yourself condemn it!
And if you have so deeply hurt what's human
In me, then tell me, how is the wife to feel,
How do I stand with you and you with me?
SCENE 4

Salome rushes in.

Salome. What awful deed have you in mind? I see
My husband led away—and he implores me
To plead with you for mercy—I hesitate,
For I am angry, do not understand him—
And now—now fearful whispers reach my ears,
They say—Their words are lies?

Herod. Your husband dies!

Salome. Before he has been judged? It cannot be!

Herod. He has been judged and by himself! He had
The document condemning him to death
In his own hands before he sinned against me,
He knew the punishment awaiting him
If he should do it; he accepted it
And yet he did it!

Salome. Herod, listen to me!
Are you so sure of that? Oh I complained
Against him, I believed that I was justified,
I had good reason for it—that he loved her
Was obvious, no longer did he have
A glance for me, or pressure of the hand—
He was with her by day whenever possible,
And in the night his dreams betrayed to me
How much his mind was with her—That is all
Quite true, and more—And yet it does not follow
From this, that she must love him in return,
Still less, I grant, that she—Oh no! oh no!
My jealousy had carried me too far—
Forgive! You too forgive. (to Mariamne) I hated you!
Oh God, how fast time flies! They said—Am I
To love you, as I hated you? Then be
No longer silent, say that he is guiltless,
Beg mercy for him, just as I myself!

Mariamne. He is!

Herod. In her sense, yes—but not in mine!

Mariamne. In your sense too!

Herod. But then you would not know
The thing you know! Now nothing can excuse him!
And if I have him put to death and do
Not first give him a hearing, then one reason
I do is this: because I want to show you
I think no ill of you and deeply rue
The hasty word I spoke at first in anger,
But more because I know that he has nothing
He can say to me!
SCENE 5

SOEMUS (enters). The bloody work
   Is done! But all Jerusalem's astounded
   And asks just why the very man whom you
   Selected to be Viceroy in your absence,
   When you left here for Egypt, had to lose
   His head at once when you return!

SALOME (totters). Alas!
   (Mariamne starts to catch her)

Away! Away! (to Herod) And she?

HEROD. Believe me, sister!
   Your husband has deceived me terribly—

SALOME. And she?

HEROD. Not in the way you think—

SALOME. Then how?

   You want to save your wife. But if my husband
   So terribly deceived you, she did too,
   For what I said is true, and everyone
   Shall know of it who does not know it yet!
   You must now wash in her blood, as in his,
   Else you will ne'er be clean again! You must!

HEROD. By all that is most sacred to me—

SALOME. Name
   His crime to me, if that is not the one!

HEROD. Were I to name it, I should make it greater!
   There was a secret I entrusted to him,
   To me it was important, he betrayed
   This secret, and shall I betray it too?

SALOME. Wretched excuse, supposed to frighten me!
   You think you can deceive me? You believe
   In everything I told you, but you are
   Too weak to stifle and suppress your love,
   And you prefer to cover the disgrace
   You are unwilling to wipe out. Unless
   You kill me too, your sister, as you did
   My husband, you will not succeed!
   (to Mariamne) He's dead,
   Now you can swear whate'er you will, he will
   Not contradict you! (exit)

HEROD. Follow her, Soemus,
   And try to calm and soothe her! You know her,
   There was a time when she would listen to you!

SOEMUS. Those times are long since past! But still I go! (exit)

MARIAMNE (aside). I would not ask for mercy for the man
   Who sought to murder me! And yet I shudder—
   There was not even time enough to do it!
HEROD (aside). It simply had to be. He could have had Uriah's place assigned to him in battle! But now I grant that I regret my haste!

SCENE 6

MESSENGER (enters). I come from Antony!
HEROD. I know then too
What word you bring. I must at once make ready.
The battle is at hand of which he spoke!
MESSENGER. Octavius already has embarked
For Africa, and Antony has joined
With Cleopatra and set out with haste
To clash with him at once near Actium—
HEROD. And then I, Herod, am to be the third!
Good! I shall go today! Soemus can
Replace me here although affairs are bad.
It's well he came!
MARIAMNE. He has to go again!
I thank Thee, God!
HEROD (watching her). Ha!
MESSENGER. No, great King, no!
His need is not at Actium, he wants
The Arabs, who have risen in revolt,
Held down and not allowed to join the foe!
That is the service he requires of you.
HEROD. It is his place to name the spot to me
Where I can be of use!
MARIAMNE. Once more! That gives him
Another chance!
HEROD (as before). See how my wife rejoices!
(to the messenger)
Tell him—but you already know!—(aside) Her brow
Is smooth, her hands are folded as in prayer—
Such is her heart!
MESSENGER. But is there nothing else?
MARIAMNE. Now I shall see: was it a fever only,
The fever of a passion so aroused
That it confused him, or his inner self
Which thus betrayed itself to me so clearly?
Now I shall see!
HEROD (to the messenger). There's nothing more! (exit messenger)
(to MARIAMNE) Your face
Now looks more cheerful! But you must not hope
Too much! One does not always die in war,
I have returned from war before, so often!
MARIAMNE (starts to speak but restrains herself).
No! No!
HEROD. The battle this time is more fierce
Than e'er before. All other times the struggle
Was fought for something in the world, but now
It's for the world itself. It shall decide
Who rules the world, is it Mark Antony,
The profligate and libertine, or is it
Octavius, whose sole claim to merit is
That never in his life has he been drunk.
Great blows will be delivered and received,
Yet it is possible your wish will not
Be realized, that death may pass me by.

MARIAMNE. My wish! Of course! My wish! It's well this way!
Be firm, my heart, do not betray yourself!
The test is none if he suspects what moves you!
And if he proves his worth, how great is your
Reward, how great his too can be! Then let him
Misjudge you! Test him! Keep the end in mind!
Think of the crown which you can hand to him
When he has overcome the demon in him!

HEROD. I thank you! You have now relieved my heart!
Although quite possibly I have transgressed
Against humanity in you, yet this
Is clear, I have not sinned against your love!
So I no longer beg you by that love
To make a final sacrifice, however,
I hope that you fulfill one final duty.
I hope for that not merely for myself,
For your own sake I hope for it much more.
You will not want me after this to see
You only in a fog; since I have sealed
The dead man's lips I hope you open yours,
And in his place explain to me, just how
It came that he presented you his head;
Because of your humanity you will,
Because of your own self-respect you will!

MARIAMNE. To keep my self-respect, I will not do it!
HEROD. So you refuse me what is reasonable?
MARIAMNE. Is reasonable! You think it would be that
For me to fall upon my knees before you
And swear: Your servant, Sire, did not come near me!
And so you can believe,—I have no right
To confidence although I am your wife—
Hear this besides, and this! Oh shame! Oh shame!
No, Herod, no! If curiosity
Should sometime ask, perhaps! Now I am silent!

HEROD. Yet if your love had been but great enough
To pardon all that I have done for love,
I never would have asked the question of you!
But since I know how small it is, I must
Repeat the question now, for such assurance
As is afforded by your love can only
Be as great as is your love itself,
And any love that values life more highly
Than the beloved, seems to me quite worthless!

MARIAMNE. And I am silent still!

HEROD. Then I declare
I will not kiss the lips again that are
Too proud to swear no other man has kissed them,
Until they do it in humility;
Yes, if there were a means of wiping out
All memory of you within my heart,
If I by simply piercing both my eyes,
Effacing thus the mirror of your beauty,
Could by that means efface your image too,
Then I would pierce them in this very hour.

MARIAMNE. Herod control yourself! I think perhaps
Right now you hold your fate within your hands,
Mayhap can even turn it as you will!
For every man at some time comes the moment
In which the guider of his star gives him
The reins to hold, and only this is bad,
He can not know the moment and it may
Be any that comes rolling by! I feel
So sure this very one is yours! So stop!
As you today mark out your course of life
You well may have to walk it to the end:
Will you do that in the wild flush of anger?

HEROD. I am afraid you sense but half the truth,
The turning point is here but is for you!
For I, what do I want? Only a means
With which to frighten evil dreams away!

MARIAMNE. I do not want to understand! I bore
You children! Think of them!

HEROD. One who is silent,
As you are, wakes suspicion that he fears
To tell the truth but does not want to lie.

MARIAMNE. No further!

HEROD. Good, no further! So farewell!
And then when I return, let that not rouse
Your anger too much!

MARIAMNE. Herod!

HEROD. Be quite sure
I will not try again as now to force
A greeting from you!

MARIAMNE. There will be no need
Of that again! (to Heaven) Guide Thou his heart, Oh God!
I had forgiven him my brother's murder,  
I was prepared to follow him in death,  
I still am, can a mortal then do more?  
God, Thou hast done what Thou hast never done,  
Rolled back the wheel of time, things stand again  
Just as before, oh let his actions this time  
Be different, then I will forget the past,  
Forget it as I would if he had made  
A thrust at me in fever with his sword  
And then, recovered, bound my wound himself.  

(To Herod) Shall I see you again?

HEROD. If you should see me,  
Then call for chains! For that will prove to you  
That I have gone insane!

MARIAMNE. You will regret  
This word!—Restrain yourself, oh heart!—You will! (Exit)

HEROD. It's true, I went too far. Already I  
Have said that to myself. But no less true,  
That if she loved me she would pardon it!  
Yes, if she loved me! Did she ever love me?  
I think she did. But now—Her brother is  
Revenged, though he is dead and in the grave!  
I had him killed to make my crown secure.  
He took with him what matters more: her heart!  
For since her brother died, her attitude  
Toward me is strangely changed. When I compared  
Her with her mother, never did I find  
The slightest trace of similarity,  
Today she seemed in more than one way like her;  
No longer can I trust her as I did!  
That is quite sure! But is it necessary  
That I assume at once she has deceived me?  
The guarantee I had because she loved me,  
That now is gone, a second guarantee  
I still have in her pride, and will a pride  
Which scornfully disdains all self-defense  
Not scorn still more thus to besmirch itself?  
It's true, she knows it! Joseph! Oh! Why can  
Man kill and not awake the dead again?  
He should be able to do both or neither!  
He is revenged! He is not here! And yet  
I see him! "You command?"—It can not be!  
No! I will not believe it! You, Salome,  
Silence! Howe'er it came, it was not thus!  
Perhaps the secret, like a fire inside him,  
Ate through him by itself. Or he betrayed it,  
Because he thought me lost and now he wanted  
To reconcile himself with Alexandra
Before the news arrived here. We shall see!
For I must test her! If I had but dreamed
She ever could find out, I never would
Have gone so far. But since she knows it now,
I must go further! For because she knows it,
I now must fear from her revenge those things
Which I had feared from her inconstancy,
Perhaps quite wrongly. I must fear that she
Will celebrate a wedding on my grave!
Soemus came quite opportunely. He is
One who would stand where I now stand, were I
Not in the world. His very coming proves
How loyally and zealously he serves me.
I will give him the order now! I know
She will lure nothing out of him, if she
Tempts him by human means!—If he betrays me,
She will have paid a price, which is—Salome
Then you were right!—The test will give the answer! (exit)
ACT IV

Zion Castle. Mariamne’s rooms.

SCENE 1

Mariamne and Alexandra.

ALEXANDRA. Your words and acts are riddles. First your oath: If he does not return, I too shall die!
Then bitter coldness when he came, defiance
Which could not but arouse his anger, as it
Gladdened me! Now again the deepest mourning!

Is there a person who can understand you?

MARIAMNE. If you find that so hard, why vex yourself?

ALEXANDRA. And then the harsh and yet reluctant way
In which you keep Soemus at a distance!
One sees that he has something on his mind—

MARIAMNE. You think so?

Yes! And he would like to tell us,
Only he does not dare, he would perhaps
Be doubtful, if he saw you throw yourself
Into the Jordan, whether he should try
To rescue you from death; he would be right,
For you have treated him disdainfully!

MARIAMNE. That is quite true, and Herod can not say,
. That I have tempted his good friend, that I
Have lured his secret from him, if he has one,
By cunning flattery. It’s in the hands
Of Heaven, whether I shall ever learn it!
I feel it in my heart, I’m risking nothing!

SCENE 2

SAMEAS (enters, his hands in chains).

The Lord is great!

MARIAMNE. He is!

ALEXANDRA. You free and yet

In chains? Another riddle!

SAMEAS. I will not
Remove these chains again! Jerusalem
Shall be reminded by them day by day
That Jonah’s grandson had to sit in prison.

ALEXANDRA. How then did you escape? You bribed the guards?

SAMEAS. I bribed? The guards?

ALEXANDRA. Of course and yet with what?

You still have on your woven gown of hair,
I doubt if they would let you out if you
Had told them where to find a nest of bees,
As you well could who know just where to find
HEROD AND MARIAMNE

Each hollow tree, for honey is not scarce!

SAMEAS. Why do you ask? Soemus opened up
The gates for me himself!

MARIAMNE. Would he have dared?
SAMEAS. Why not? I thought that you had ordered it.
MARIAMNE. I?
SAMEAS. No? And yet it seems to me he said so!
I can be wrong, for I was just repeating
The last Psalm backwards when he came, and so
I listened to him with but half an ear!
Oh well! So then it was the Lord, and I
Must go up to the Temple to give thanks
And have no errand here in David's palace!

MARIAMNE. The Lord!
SAMEAS. The Lord! Was I then justly jailed?
MARIAMNE. Those times are long since past in which the Lord
Was wont to speak directly to his people.
We have the law instead, and it speaks for Him!
The pillar of fire and smoke has ceased to be,
By which he marked the paths across the deserts
For our forefathers, and the prophets are
As silent as the Lord!

ALEXANDRA. Not all are silent!
Just recently one prophesied a fire;
This prophecy was afterward fulfilled!
MARIAMNE. Of course, but he himself had set the fire
At midnight.
SAMEAS. Woman! That is blasphemy!
MARIAMNE. It is no blasphemy, I know it happened!
He is a Pharisee as you yourself,
He speaks like you, he raves like you, the fire
Was planned to be the proof he really was
A prophet able to foresee the future,
But then a soldier caught him in the act.
SAMEAS. A Roman?
MARIAMNE. Yes!
SAMEAS. He lied! He was perhaps
A hireling! Had perhaps been hired by Herod
Or hired by you!
MARIAMNE. Do not forget yourself!
SAMEAS. You are his wife, the wife of the blasphemer
Who looks upon himself as the Messiah;
Since you can clasp him in your arms and kiss him,
You might do other things for him as well!
ALEXANDRA. He looks upon himself as the Messiah?
SAMEAS. He does, he told it to me to my face
When he was having me led off to prison.
I cried unto the Lord, I cried: Oh guard
ACT IV, SCENE 3

Thy people, send us the Messiah whom
Thou promised us in times of direst need,
Those times are now upon us! Then he said
With haughty scorn: Oh He is long since here,
You merely do not know it! I am He!

ALEXANDRA. Well, Mariamne?

SAMEAS. With accursed wit
He proved we are a folk of lunatics
And he alone enjoys the gift of reason,
We do not dwell in vain beside the Dead Sea,
In which there is no ebb and flow of tide,
And that explains why everyone is tainted.
It is a faithful mirror of ourselves!
But he intends to give us life and vigor,
Even if he must take that stupid book
Of Moses from us—such his impious words—
For that bears all the blame that we are not
More like the Jordan, our clear river, rippling
Along so merrily, but like a swamp.

ALEXANDRA. He threw away his mask completely?

SAMEAS. Yes!

Perhaps, however, when he did, already
He thought of me as dead; right afterward
He ordered that I die.

MARIAMNE. He was provoked!

He found rebellion here!

SAMEAS. I now remind you
Of what your duty is. You must renounce him
Even as he renounced the Lord! You can
Thus punish him, for Herod loves you much!
And when Soemus set me free I thought
You had already done it. Unless you do it,
Then do not call the lightning from the clouds
At all unjust, if it strikes you like him!
I go to offer sacrifice!

ALEXANDRA. Then take
The victim from my flock!

SAMEAS. I take it where
It’s missed! The widow’s lamb, the poor man’s sheep!
What use has God for yours! (exit)

SCENE 3

SOEMUS (comes). Your pardon!

MARIAMNE. I was
About to summon you! I bid you welcome!

SOEMUS. This is the first time, is it not?

MARIAMNE. It is!
HEROD AND MARIAMNE

SOEMUS. You have avoided me till now!
MARIAMNE. Have you
Sought me and have you something then to seek?
I do not like to think of it.
SOEMUS. One thing at least:
Consider me as your most faithful servant!
MARIAMNE. I did, but I no longer do!
SOEMUS. No longer?
MARIAMNE. How can you open up the prison doors
And let the rebel out whom Herod jailed?
Is Herod still the King, or is he not?
SOEMUS. The answer's not as easy as you think!
MARIAMNE. If it is hard, then you will have to suffer!
SOEMUS. You have not heard the battle has been lost!
MARIAMNE. At Actium? The battle has been lost?
SOEMUS. Mark Antony has died by his own hand!
Queen Cleopatra too, by hers!
MARIAMNE. She had
The courage? She could never bear to look
Upon a sword, recoiled from his when once
He held it up before her as a mirror!
SOEMUS. It was reported so to Captain Titus!
Octavius cursed aloud because they were
Not hindered! I myself read the dispatch!
MARIAMNE. Then Death has had his share for many days
And every head is safer than it was
Before!
SOEMUS. Do you think so?
MARIAMNE. You smile so strangely!
SOEMUS. It seems you do not know Octavius!
He will not ask if Death is surfeited,
He will prepare another feast for him
Of friends of Antony, there is no lack
Of dainty morsels for this feast of death!
MARIAMNE. Does that apply to Herod?
SOEMUS. If he does
What he proposed—
MARIAMNE. And what was that?
SOEMUS. He said:
My love for Antony is past, I would
Much rather say I hate him, but I shall
Continue to stand by him till the last,
Although I am afraid that he must fall,
I owe it to myself, if not to him!
MARIAMNE. Quite like a king!
SOEMUS. Yes, like a king! Only
Octavius is not one to admire it,
If Herod should do that—
MARIAMNE. Who dares to doubt?

SOLEMUS. Then he is lost indeed, or else they wronged
    Octavius grievously when they held him
    Responsible for all the bloody slaughter
    That followed Caesar's death!

MARIAMNE. That you believe
    So firmly in this outcome, that already
    You number Herod with the dead, is clear,
    Or else you would not dare what you have dared.
    I shudder too, and I admit it freely,
    At your assurance, for you are no fool,
    And surely not without good reason risk
    So much. And yet, however things may stand,
    I still am here and I assure you, that I
    Will find a way to bring obedience
    To him in death, not even one command
    That he has given shall be unfulfilled,
    And that shall be his sacrifice!

SOLEMUS. Not one!
    I doubt it, Queen!—(to himself) Now let the blow descend!

MARIAMNE. As surely as I am a Maccabee,
    You shall send Sameas back to his prison!

SOLEMUS. If you desire it, then it shall be done,
    If you want more, if he shall die, just as
    The King decreed, speak and he is dead!
    But now may I have leave to ask a question:
    Am I, so that the sacrifice you plan
    To offer for the dead may be complete,
    Am I to take my sword and thrust it through you?
    That too is a command he left with me!

MARIAMNE. Alas!

ALEXANDRA. Oh no!

MARIAMNE. So then the end is here!
    And what an end! So dwarfing the beginning
    And everything besides! The past, the future
    As well, for me it all dissolves to nothing.
    I had nothing, I have nothing, I shall
    Have nothing. No one ever was so poor!

ALEXANDRA. Whatever evil deeds you might report
    Of Herod, I could well believe them all,
    But this—

MARIAMNE. Oh do not doubt! For it is true!

ALEXANDRA. Do you say that?

MARIAMNE. Oh God, I know well why!

ALEXANDRA. Then you will know what you must do!

MARIAMNE. Yes, this!

(solemnly)

ALEXANDRA (preventing her).
HEROD AND MARIAMNE

Have you gone mad? Is that what he deserves?
That you should act the hangman on yourself?
MARIAMNE. That was reversing it! Thank you! He chose
This office for himself!

(she hurls the dagger from her)

Away, you tempter!
ALEXANDRA. You will now seek protection of the Romans!
MARIAMNE. I shall not hinder anyone for whom
That seems important—I myself tonight
Will give a feast!
ALEXANDRA. A feast!
MARIAMNE. There I will dance! —
Yes, yes, that is the way!
ALEXANDRA. And to what end?
MARIAMNE. Ho, servants! (servants come)
Open up the banquet halls!

Invite all those who feel in festive mood!
Light all the candles, any that will burn,
Pluck all the flowers that are not yet wilted!

(to Moses) You once arranged the wedding feast for us,
This feast today must far surpass that other,
So spare no effort! (she steps forward) Herod, tremble now!
And even if you never did before!

SOEMUS (steps up to her).
I feel the pain as much as you!
MARIAMNE. I do
Not want your pity! You are not a hangman,
I have no call to doubt, for you have shown it;

Instead you are a traitor, and I can not
Owe thanks to traitors nor endure them round me,
However useful in this world they are.
For this I judge aright! If you had been
The man you seemed to be, God would have had
To work a miracle, He would have had
To give the very air the tongue it lacks;
That He foresaw when He created you,
So He made you the foremost of dissemblers!

SOEMUS. No! That I am not! I was Herod's friend,
I was his brother-in-arms and his companion
Before the throne was his, I was his servant,
Most faithful servant, after he was king.
But only while in me he recognized
The human being, honored him in me,
As I in him the hero and the king.

And that he did, until, unworthily
Dissembling, he cast down his eyes and gave
The dread command by which he heartlessly
Consigned both you and me to certain death, 2190
Exposed me to the vengeance of your people,
To Roman anger, and to his own spite,
As he did you to death at my sword's point.
I then had proof of what I meant to him!

MARIAMNE. And did you give expression to your horror? 2195
SOEMUS. I did not, for I wanted to protect you!
So I pretended to accept, dissembled,
If you prefer, so that he would not give
The order to another, and kill me;
A Galilean would have done the deed!

MARIAMNE. Forgive my words! You stand to him as I,
Like me you are offended in your inmost
Being, like me degraded to a thing!
He is a friend, just as he is a husband.
Come to my feast! (exit) 2205

ALEXANDRA. So you were waiting too, biding your time,
As I!

SOEMUS. My time? What do you mean by that?
ALEXANDRA. I always noted with astonishment
The way you bowed before this king, who owed
His high position to the Roman's whim,
The reveller's drunken ecstacy and not
To race and birth, as if you had forgotten,
As he had, that you are his equal; now
I see your aim, you only planned to make
Him feel secure! 2215

SOEMUS. In that, you are mistaken!
I spoke the truth in all. I do not think
I am his equal and I never shall!
I know how many rogues there are who serve him
With grumbling only for the reason: Herod
Is not his grandson; I know others only
Are loyal for the sake of Mariamne;
But I do not belong to any group
That rather would obey an infant's sword,
That is inherited, than hero's sword,
That is but freshly forged and fire hardened.
I always looked upon him as superior,
I was as ready to pick up his shield
For him, my friend-in-arms, when he might let
It fall, as ever the scepter for the king!
The crown, the best of women, never did I
Begrudge him either, for I felt his worth!

ALEXANDRA. But you too are a man!

SOEMUS. That I have not
Forgotten that, is what I now am proving!
None is so great that he may use me as
A tool! Whoever asks a service of me
Which—done or not done as it comes—consigns me
Disgracefully to certain death, that man
Frees me from every duty; him I have
To show, that there exists a middle step
Between the one for kings and that for slaves
And that on this stands man!

ALEXANDRA. It makes no difference
Just what your reason: it's enough to find
You on my side!

SOEMUS. No longer fear a struggle,
He is as good as dead! Octavius
Is not an Antony, who lets one hack
Away his flesh and then forgives it freely,
Because he so admires the hand that does it!
He only sees the blows!

ALEXANDRA. And Titus says . . . ?

SOEMUS. He thinks as I! I freed your Sameas
Only because I wanted her to call
Me to account. That was the only way
I knew to get a hearing with the Queen!
She knows now what she has to know, and is
Prepared for it when news of death arrives.
That was my purpose! What a noble woman!
Kill her! A pity, even if she wept!

ALEXANDRA. Surely, a tender husband!—Talk to her,
Persuade her if you can that she should seek
Protection with the Romans, and yourself
Come to the feast by which she breaks with Herod,
Be he now dead or still alive! (exit)

SOEMUS (following her). He's dead!

SCENE 4

Servants enter and make arrangements for the feast.

MOSES. Well Artaxerxes? Lost again in thought?
Come, come! You're not the clock with us, you know!

ARTAXERXES. If you had had that job for years, as I have,
Then your reactions would be quite like mine!
Especially if every night you dreamed
You had the former duty to discharge!
With my right hand I grasp the left hand's pulse
Involuntarily and count and count
And often count to sixty beats, before I
Remember I no longer am a clock!

MOSES. Remember then that here with us your job
Is not to measure time! For that we have
The sundial and the sand! And you have things
To do in time, just like the rest of us! It's loafing, nothing else!

**Artaxerxes.** I swear it's not!

**Moses.** Be still! You never count while you are eating!
And furthermore, we do not swear here either,
And (to himself) if the King himself were not half Gentile
We would not have a foreign servant either!
There the musicians come already! Hurry! *(joins the others)*

**Jehu.** You, is that really true what people tell
About you?

**Artaxerxes.** Why then should it not be true?
Must I confirm the tale a hundred times?
That at the satrap's court I was the clock
And was much better off than here with you!
At night I was relieved, then 'twas my brother,
And daytimes too, when it was time to eat.
I do not feel so grateful to your King
That with the other prisoners of war
He dragged me here. I grant my work at last
Was getting hard. I had to go along
To war, and when you see the arrows flying
And people falling all around, you are
More apt to miss the count than in a hall
Where people come together for a dance.
I shut my eyes, for I am not a hero
The way my father was. An arrow hit him
While at his post—he also was a clock,
As we, my brother too, and I, we all
Were clocks—he called the hour and died! How's that?
That was a man! That took a deal more courage
Than it required to shoot the arrow at him!

**Jehu.** Have you no sand at home then? Is that why
You have to do that?

**Artaxerxes.** We? Have we no sand?
More than enough to cover all Judea!
It's only that our satrap, so they say
Has every thing much better than the others.
The pulse of man, you know, beats more exactly,
If he is well and does not have a fever,
Than ever any sand runs through a tube.
And of what use to you are sundials then,
On days it does not suit the sun to shine?
*(counts)* One—two—

**Moses (returns).** Be off! The guests are coming now!

**Artaxerxes.** Is that a feast? I have seen different feasts,
Where only food was eaten that had come
From foreign countries! Where a guest was punished,
Yes even put to death, if he should dare
To drink a drop of water, and where men
Who had been wrapped in hemp well soaked with pitch
Were later set ablaze and burned by night
As torches in the gardens—

Moses. Stop! What crime
Against your satrap had those men committed?

Artaxerxes. Committed? Nothing! Funerals with us
Are much more splendid than are weddings here!

Moses. Presumably you feast upon your dead?
That would go well with all the rest!

Artaxerxes. Perhaps
It is not true then either that your Queen
Dissolved a pearl once in a glass of wine,
A pearl more valuable than all the kingdom,
And that she gave a beggar this same wine,
Who drank it as he would have any other!

Moses. That is not true, thank God!

Artaxerxes (to Jehu). You said it was!

Jehu. Because it seemed to me to be an honor for her
And I had heard it told of the Egyptian!

Moses. Get out!

Artaxerxes (points to the roses Jehu carries).
Are those real roses? They are cheap,
With us all roses are of gold and silver!
They ought to send them where the flowers are
As valuable as gold and silver here!
The servants scatter. The guests, Soemus among them, have been gathering during the last half of this scene. Music. Dancing. Silo and Judas leave the others and step forward.

Silo. What is the reason for this feast?

Judas. The reason?
The King is coming back! And that today!

Silo. Really?

Judas. How can you ask! What other reason
Could there well be for such a festival?
Best practice some new way to bow and scrape!

Silo. Did they not say—

Judas. All lies! It always is
When rumor says some ill has come to him!
And that is natural, there are so many
Who wish him ill! Besides, do people dance
In homes where they are mourning for the dead?

Silo. Then very soon the blood will flow in streams,
The jails are full to bursting since the riot!

Judas. I know that better far than you can know it,
I dragged so many into jail myself.
This riot was so absolutely senseless
That everyone was forced to fight against it
ACT IV, SCENE 5

Who did not crave a hanging for himself.
You know I have no love at all for Herod,
However deeply I may bow before him,
But what he says is right: the Romans are
Too powerful for us, we are no more
Than insects are within the lion's jaws,
They dare not sting, for they would be devoured!

SILO. I'm only sorry for my gardener's son
Who threw a stone right at a Roman eagle
And hit it too! That is hard luck for him.

JUDAS. How old is he?

SILO. How long ago was it
I broke my ankle?—That's when he was born,
For then his mother could not be my nurse,
That's right—he's twenty!

JUDAS. There's no danger then!

(Mariamne and Alexandra appear)

The Queen! (starts to go)

SILO. Why not? What do you mean? Explain!

JUDAS. Well then! In confidence! Since he is twenty
There is no danger, but were he nineteen
Or twenty-one, it would be bad for him!
Next year it will be different!

SILO. Do not joke!

JUDAS. I tell you it is true! You wonder why?
The King himself is father of a son
Of twenty years, and yet he does not know him!
When he deserted her, the mother took
The child away and swore a solemn oath
She would corrupt the child—

SILO. A Gentile?

JUDAS. Probably! I do not know!—
But so that he would have to kill his son,
You understand? I think it was a frenzy
Which then subsided after her first rage,
Yet he is anxious, and no decree of death
Has ever been enforced against a man
Whose age was that of Herod's son.
Comfort your gardener! But keep it to yourself!

(they lose themselves among the others)

SCENE 5

Alexandra and Mariamne in the foreground.

ALEXANDRA. You will not seek protection of the Romans?

MARIAMNE. Why should I?

ALEXANDRA. To be sure you stay alive!
HEROD AND MARIAMNE

MARIAMNE. Alive! Of course! One has to stay alive!
   Pain has no sting unless one is alive!
ALEXANDRA. At least then you should give the hour its due!
   You hold a feast, so you should show your guests
   A festive face, as is but fit and proper!
MARIAMNE. I am no instrument nor yet a candle,
   Am not supposed to sound nor yet to shine,
   So take me as I am! No! Do not do it!
   Urge me to whet the axe for my own neck,
   What am I saying, urge me to make merry—
   Cheer up, Soemus!
   (to Salome as she enters and approaches)
   You Salome? Welcome
   Especially to me, although in mourning!
   I scarcely hoped for that!

SCENE 6

SALOME. I have to come
   If I desire to know how matters stand!
   I am invited to attend a feast
   But no one tells me why the feast is held!
   I may suspect, but really I must know!
   You are expecting Herod back? We shall
   See him today? The candles tell me yes,
   The merry music! You must tell me too!
   I do not ask for me! But as you know—
   No, no, you do not know, you have forgotten,
   Perhaps you dreamed that she was dead and buried,
   Else you would not have kept the news from her,
   Only your dream deceived you, for she still
   Is sitting in the corner where she sat
   When she blessed you—
MARIAMNE. What is it you are saying?
SALOME. Enough! For Herod has a mother still,
   Who pines away with worry for her son.
   And I, I beg you: Do not let her longer
   Do penance for the crime of bearing me,
   Give her the comfort which her heart requires!
MARIAMNE. I have no comfort I can give his mother!
SALOME. Today then you are not expecting Herod?
MARIAMNE. No, not at all! I heard that he was dead!
SALOME. And yet you celebrate?
MARIAMNE. Since I still live!
   And shall one not rejoice that one still lives?
SALOME. That—I do not believe!
MARIAMNE. Thanks for your doubt!
SALOME. The candles—
ACT IV, SCENE 7

MARIAMNE. Are intended to shed light.

SALOME. The cymbals—

MARIAMNE. Must resound, why else have cymbals?

SALOME (points to Mariamne's festive clothing).

The jewels—

MARIAMNE. Would of course become you better—

SALOME. That indicates—

MARIAMNE. A joyous festival!

SALOME. But held above a grave—

MARIAMNE. Quite possible!

SALOME. Then—Mariamne, hear a serious word!

I always hated you, but always I

Have doubted whether it was justified,

And penitent I often came to you

To—

MARIAMNE. Kiss me! Once you even did it too!

SALOME. But now I see that you are—

MARIAMNE. Rude enough

To leave you standing here alone, and join

The group beginning dancing over there!

Soemus!

SOEMUS (offers his arm). Yes, my Queen!

MARIAMNE. I am quite sure

That Herod saw me thus, when he gave you

The bloody order. Is it not amazing!

Now everything has come as he expected!

(as she goes away, to Salome)

You will look on?

(with Soemus backstage where they are no longer seen)

SALOME. This woman is still worse

Than I had thought! And that is saying much!

That's why she has the brilliant serpent's skin

With which she lures all men!—Yes, she is dancing!

Well, truly, now my conscience is at rest,

No one on earth can do her an injustice!

(she watches Mariamne)

SCENE 7

Alexandra comes with Titus.

ALEXANDRA. Titus, you notice how my daughter mourns!

TITUS. Perhaps she has some further news from Herod?

ALEXANDRA. The news that all is over with him! Yes!

TITUS (looks at Mariamne).

She dances!

ALEXANDRA. Like a bride, not like a widow!

Titus, until today she wore a mask,

And, mark you, she was not the only one!
HEROD AND MARIAMNE

TITUS. It's for her good! She stays then what she is! If she is one of Herod's enemies She will not have to suffer with his friends!

ALEXANDRA. To show us that, she gives this festival! (turns away from Titus)

TITUS. These women send a thrill of horror through me! The one hews off the hero's head, whom she Has just won over with her traitorous kisses, While he is still asleep, the other dances Like mad upon the grave of her dead husband Because she wants to keep the crown herself! I surely was invited here to see that—

(he looks at Mariamne again)

Yes, yes, I see and will report in Rome— But here I shall not drink a drop of wine!

SALOME. Well, Titus, what do you say? Is the King So badly off that she may venture all?

TITUS. If he did not go over to Octavius At once and help to give Mark Antony The final blow even before his fall, And that I doubt, then things look bad for him!

SALOME. If he had only done it!—If she should keep Her head, then I do not know why the Lord Gave dogs the flesh of haughty Jezebel To eat! (she mingles with the others)

TITUS. She goes on dancing, but it seems It is not easy for her! She ought to glow, But she is pale, as if in thought she were Some other place and only following The dance mechanically! Well even Judith May well have felt some fear while at her task! This woman too must still feel on her lips The last kiss of the husband whom she now So solemnly renounces here before me, And she has not yet seen him dead!—She comes! Mariamne appears again. Alexandra and Soemus follow her.

ALEXANDRA (to Mariamne). I spoke with Titus! 

MARIAMNE (as she turns sees her image in the mirror) Ha!

ALEXANDRA. What is the matter? MARIAMNE. Just so I saw myself once in my dreams!— So it was that, which would not let me rest Until I found the ruby I had lost Which gleams so somber now upon my breast: The picture would not be complete without it!— The last scene follows soon!

ALEXANDRA. Come to yourself!
MARIAMNE. Let me alone!—A mirror quite like that!
At first a little dimmed as by the breath
Of someone, then quite gently clearing, like
The images it showed me one by one,
And gleaming finally like polished steel.
I saw my life entire! First I appeared
A child enveloped in a rosy light
That slowly changed into a deeper red:
The features, though my own, seemed strange to me
And only in the third clear transformation
I recognized my own too youthful face.
And now there came the maiden and the moment
When Herod led me to the flower garden
And said to me with ardent flattery:
Of all these flowers none is too beautiful
For your dear hand to pluck!—Accurst be he
That he forgot it so completely!—Then it
Became uncanny and against my will
I had to see the future. So and so
I saw myself—and last as I stand here!
(to Alexandra) Is it not strange, a dream so comes to life?—
The gleaming mirror now grew dull again,
The light turned ashen hue and I myself,
Who had just been so glowing, was as pale
As if my blood had long been flowing out
From all my veins beneath this festive garment;
My flesh did creep, I cried: Now I am coming
As skeleton and that I will not see!
I turned away—(she turns away from the mirror)

VOICES IN THE BACKGROUND. The King! (general commotion)
ALEXANDRA. What? Who?

SCENE 8

MARIAMNE. It's Death! Grim Death! Yes, Death is here
among us!
And unannounced, just as he always comes!
SALOME. Yes, death for you! You feel it close upon you!
My brother!
(she is about to embrace Herod, he pushes her away)
HEROD. Mariamne! (he draws near)
MARIAMNE. Draw your sword!
Prepare the poison cup! For you are Death!
And Death's embrace and kiss is sword and poison!
HEROD (turns to Salome). What does it mean? Already from afar
A thousand candles called out through the night:
Your messenger is safe, he was not captured
By Arabs, he arrived, you are expected,
And now—

**SALOME.** The candles have deceived you badly,
They were rejoicing here, they thought you dead!
Your messenger did not arrive, your mother
Has rent her garments over you!

(HEROD looks around, sees TITUS, and beckons him)

**TITUS (steps forward).** It's so!
Here no man was prepared, not even I,
To think you would desert Mark Antony
Before the battle lost at Actium
And join your force to Caesar's, as good judgment
So clearly counseled! That this is what you did
Is proved to me by your return. Well then!
I—wish you luck!

**MARIAMNE (joins them).** And I lament the fact
That opportunity was not presented
To slay Mark Antony with your own hand.
Thus you would best have shown to your new lord
That you no more had interest in the old one;
You would have brought your friend's head with you for him,
He would have paid you for it with the crown!

**HEROD.** Shame, Titus, shame! You too think that of me?
I marched right down into Arabia
As Antony had bidden me to do,
But there I found no enemy! So I
Set out for Actium and it was not
My fault that I arrived too late. If he
Had held, as I believed he would and could,
I would (to MARIAMNE) have sought the opportunity
To pay him for the crown by giving him
Octavius' head! (to TITUS) But he did not! He was
Already dead when I appeared, a friend
Was now no longer necessary, and I
Sought out Octavius; but not as king—
I laid the crown aside—I did not go
As beggar either. I drew my sword and said:
I planned to use this sword against you, might
Perhaps have colored it with your own blood
Had things been different here. But that is over!
I lower it before you, lay it down!
Consider now how firm a friend I was,
Not whose; dead Antony has set me free!
Henceforth I can be your friend if you will!

**TITUS.** And he?

**HEROD.** He said: where have you left your crown?
I want to add another jewel to it,
The province you have lacked! For you shall feel
It only in my generosity
That I am victor, not Mark Antony.
He never would have taken it away
From Cleopatra, I present it to you!

TITUS. That—I should never have believed. I praise
Your star alone!

HEROD. Oh Titus, do not praise it!
For I was spared for onerous tasks! Soemus!
(Soemus stays where he is and does not answer)

Did you betray me? You are mute! I know
Enough! Away with him!

SOEMUS (while being led away). I make no plea!
But you may well believe I thought you dead!
Now do what pleases you! (exit)

HEROD. And after death
It all ends, does it not? Yes! Yes! My Titus,
If you had known the man as I — — You would not
Be standing here as calm and self-possessed
As I am, you would gnash your teeth and froth
With rage and cry in anger: (to Mariamne) Woman, what did
You do to make him go so far?—Salome,
You were right, I must wash and wash myself—
I must have blood! The Court shall sit at once!
(to Mariamne) Still silent? Taking refuge in defiance?
And I know why! You still remember what
You were to me! It would be easier
To tear my heart out of my breast—yes, Titus—
Than (again to Mariamne) you out of my heart. And yet I do it!

MARIAMNE (turns abruptly).
I am a prisoner?

HEROD. Yes!

MARIAMNE (to the soldiers). Take me hence!
(turns—at a sign from Herod, Joab follows her with soldiers)

Death can not be my husband any longer! (exit)

HEROD. Ha! Ha! Once long ago I said to her:

Two people can not ever one outlive
The other, if their love is deep and true,
And even if I fell on distant fields;
One would not need to send a messenger,
For you at once would feel it when it happened,
Without a wound would die with me of mine!

Oh Titus, do not laugh at me! It’s true!
But people do not love each other so! (exit)
ACT V

Large audience room as in the first act. Throne and judges' table.

SCENE 1

Herod and Salome.

HEROD. Enough! I have directed that the Court
Shall sit and I shall execute its sentence!
Yes I, who used to fear each sign of fever,
And if it only struck her waiting-woman,
Now I myself am arming death against her!
It is enough! And if your zeal will still
Not let you rest, then it will miss its goal
And I shall surely think that hate alone
Speaks from your lips, and as a witness shall
Reject you, even though I let each candle
Bring evidence, that was ablaze that night,
And every flower that filled the air with fragrance!

SALOME. But Herod! I will not deny that I
Have often hunted for her failings and
Have magnified them, just as you the virtues
That you discovered in her. Could the pride
With which she never failed to treat your mother
And me, could such a pride inspire love?
She thought herself a higher type of being,
But one which never did arouse in me
Another thought than this: What is the need
Of that thick book in which we are informed
About the Maccabees' heroic deeds?
The chronicle is written on her face!

HEROD. Your aim is to refute me, and you seal
The judgment I pronounced!

SALOME. Pray hear me out!
I grant that it was so. But if I now
Said more than what I know and think and feel,
Yes, if because of sisterly compassion
I did not still lock in my breast the half
Of what I might have said, then may my child—
I love him dearly!—live as many years
As there are hairs that grow upon his head,
And may each day bring him as many pangs
As it has minutes, yes, as it has seconds!

HEROD. The oath is terrible!

SALOME. And yet I find
It easier to say than: Night is black!
My eye might well be sick, but scarcely could
It be, that at the same time with the eye
The ear be sick, the heart, the instinct, all
The other organs that support my senses!
And this time all of them are in agreement,
As if they could not contradict each other.
Yes, if upon that festive night the Lord
Had cried out to me from the vault of Heaven:
From what dire evil shall I free your earth,
You have your choice, then I would not have named
The plague, I would have named your wicked wife!
I shuddered at the sight of her, it seemed
As if I had stretched out my human hand
In darkness to a demon out of Hell
And he were scoffing at me for it, stepping
Forth from that stolen body of flesh and blood
And in his own so terrifying form
Were leering at me through the smoke and flames;
Not only I was shuddering so, even
The Roman, hardened Titus, was amazed!

HEROD. Indeed, and he weighs heavier than you,
For as he loves no one, he hates no one,
And he is just, like spirits without blood.
Now leave me, for I am expecting him!

SALOME. No, no, I never shall forget this dance
At which she moved in rhythm with the music
And yet as if she knew for certain you
Lay dead beneath the ground! By God, I would
I did not have to say that! For I know
How it must rouse you, who have sacrificed
Your mother, sister, and much more for her!
But so it was! (exit)

SCENE 2

HEROD (alone). What Titus told me was
The same! Besides I saw enough myself!
And she is right! I sacrificed my sister
For her, almost my mother: would not they
Outweigh the one, the brother she has lost?
In her eyes they would not!

SCENE 3

Titus enters.

HEROD. Well, Titus, has
Soemus yet confessed?

TITUS. The things you know!

No more!

HEROD. And not—
HEROD AND MARIAMNE

TITUS. Oh no! He flared right up
     In rage when I remotely hinted at it!
HEROD. I could expect it!
TITUS. Never had there lived
     A wife like yours and never had there been
     A man so little worthy of the jewel
     That God had granted him—
HEROD. As I myself!
     Yes, yes!—"He did not know what pearls were worth,
     Therefore I stole them from him," said the thief.
     I do not think it helped.
TITUS. Her heart was rarer
     Than gold—
HEROD. He knows it? He is all aglow,
     Praises the wine! Is that not proof enough
     That he has tasted it? What reason did
     He give you? Why did he betray my order
     To her?
TITUS. Abhorrence, so he said!
HEROD. Abhorrence?
     And did not say a word to me about it?
TITUS. Would that have been advisable for him?
     Could you have let the stubborn servant live
     Who ever once received an order from you
     And then refused it?
HEROD. Was it not enough?
     In such a case, to leave it unfulfilled?
TITUS. Of course! If he went further, then he did it
     Perhaps because you seemed already lost
     And now at your expense he may have wished
     To gain himself the favor of the Queen
     In whose two hands his future fortune lay.
HEROD. No, Titus, no! Soemus was the man
     To risk the stroke himself, that makes the favor
     Of any other quite unnecessary!
     Therefore I gave the charge to him, I thought:
     He certainly will do it for himself,
     If not for you! Were he a lesser man,
     Did he not have so many friends in Rome,
     I might perhaps believe, but now—No, no!
     There was one reason only!
TITUS. Yet he will not
     Admit that one!
HEROD. He would not be the man
     He is, if he admitted it. He knows
     Full well what must now follow and he hopes
     By his denial to awake in me
     A final doubt which, if it does not save
ACT V, SCENE 4

His head for him, may yet guard hers from death!
But he is wrong, the doubt lacks any sting,
For had I nothing that she did to punish,
I have what she became and what she is!
Ah! Had she ever been what she appeared:
She never could have so transformed herself;
And I take vengeance on the hypocrite!
Yes, Titus, yes, I swear it by the key
To paradise she holds within her hands;
By all the happiness which she has brought
To me, and all the joy she still could bring;
Yes by the shudder which just now has warned me
That I shall but destroy myself in her:
Yes make an end, however it may be!
TITUS. It is too late to cry a warning to you:
Oh do not give the order! and I know
No means myself that can bring clarity
And so I do not dare to say: Desist!

SCENE 4

Joa,enters.

HEROD. Are they convened?
JOAB. Long since! And from the prison
I must report what seems important to me!
I must report that Sameas can not
Be brought to kill himself!
HEROD. My order was
That torture be inflicted till he does!
(to Titus) I heard that he had sworn to kill himself
If he could not make me the like of him,
Not break the Gentile streak in me—
He calls it that. Since he did not succeed
In that, I force him now to keep his oath,
He has deserved that death a thousandfold!
TITUS. I would have strongly urged his death myself,
He has affronted me and Rome in me
And that can everywhere be freely pardoned
But not here, where the people are so headstrong!
HEROD (to Joab). Well then!
JOAB. They did exactly as you ordered,
Only it did not help at all. The hangman
Tried almost every torture on him. He gave
Him wounds besides, for he was angered so
By his defiance, which he took for scorn,
But it is just as if he lashed a tree,
As if he had been cutting into wood:
The old man stands as if he had felt nothing,
He sings instead of screaming and makes no move
To grasp the dagger which they hold before him,
He sings the psalm the three men sang when they
Were in the burning fiery furnace, sings
More loudly still at each new pang of torture,
And when he stops, he even prophesies!
HEROD (aside). Yes, that is how they are!—Will she be different?

JOAB. As if he had received the gift of eyes
For secret and mysterious things, as many
As he has wounds, he cries aloud: The time
Is now fulfilled and at this sacred moment
The Virgin Mother of the tribe of David
Is laying in the manger bed a Child
Who will cause thrones to topple, wake the dead,
Tear stars from Heaven, and will rule the world
From everlasting, unto everlasting!
The mob meanwhile has gathered there in thousands,
Awaits outside the gates, hears everything,
Believes Elijah will again send down
The chariots of fire to carry him
To Heaven like the prophet. Even a hangman
Was terrified and held the old wounds closed
Instead of wounding him anew!

HEROD. They shall
Put him to death at once; when he is dead,
Shall show him to the people!—And then bid
The judges come as well and—

JOAB. and the Queen! (exit)

HEROD. You, Titus, will please sit beside me here!
I also sent a summons to her mother,
So she shall feel no lack of witnesses.

SCENE 5

Aaron and the other five judges enter. Alexandra and Salome follow.
Joab enters immediately after them.

ALEXANDRA. My King and Lord, I give you greeting!

HEROD. Thank you!

He seats himself upon the throne, Titus sits down beside him, the judges at a sign from him take seats in a semicircle round the table.

ALEXANDRA (while this is taking place).
I think of Mariamne's fate as something
Distinct from mine, and save myself, as if
I were a torch, for what is yet to come.

HEROD (to the judges).
You know why I have had you summoned here!

AARON. It was with deepest pain that we appeared!
ACT V, SCENE 5

HEROD. I do not doubt that! You are all related
   Or stand on terms of friendship with my house,
   So what hurts me, hurts you! You will be glad
Then, if the Queen, whom I—(he hesitates) But spare me that!
   You will be glad, if you do not condemn her,
   If you may send her home to me, instead
   Of sending her to Golgotha, and yet
   If that necessity arises, you will
   Not lose your courage but will face the worst,
   For as you share my fortune and misfortune
   So you will share disgrace and honor too.
   Proceed then!

_He gives Joab a sign. Joab goes and returns with Mariamne._

A long pause follows.

HEROD. Aaron!

AARON. Queen! Our task is not
   An easy one! You stand before your judges!

MARIAMNE. Before my judges, yes, and also you!

AARON. Do you not recognize this Court?

MARIAMNE. I see
   A higher one! If that permits an answer
   To questions that you ask, then I shall speak,
   And shall keep silent, if that Court forbids!—
   My eyes can scarcely see you, for behind you
   Stand spirits that regard me, silent, solemn;
   They are the famous forebears of my race.
   For three long nights I saw them in my dreams
   And now they come by day as well, I know
   Exactly what it means to see the dance
   Of death already opened up for me
   And all who live and breathe becoming pale;
   There right behind that throne on which a king
   Appears to sit, stands Judas Maccabaeus:
   Hero of Heroes, gaze not down so darkly
   On me, you shall be satisfied with me!

ALEXANDRA. Not too defiant, Mariamne!

MARIAMNE. Mother!
   Farewell!—(to Aaron) Of what then do I stand accused?

AARON. That you deceived your king and husband—
   (to Herod) Is

That right?

MARIAMNE. Deceived? And how? Impossible!
   Did he not find me as he thought he would?
   Did he not find me dancing and at play?
   Did I put on deep mourning when I heard
   That he was dead? Did I shed tears of grief?
   Or tear my hair? Oh, I would then have been
   Deceiving him, but I did not do that
And I can prove it. Speak your mind, Salome!

**HEROD.** I found her as she says. She does not need
To look around to find another witness.
But never, never had I thought it of her!

**MARIAMNE.** Not thought it? Yet you stationed close behind me
The hangman in his mask? That can not be!
For as I stood before his mind at parting,
Just so he found me after his return,
And so I must deny that I deceived him!

**HEROD (breaking out in wild laughter).**
So she did not deceive me, since she only
Did what foreboding, premonition let
Me fear—How much I praise that sinister
Admonisher!—(to Mariamne) Ah! Woman! That is like you!

But do not build too much upon the hope
That I, with joy and peace, have also lost
My strength, perhaps enough is left for vengeance
And—even as a boy I always shot
An arrow after birds if they escaped me.

**MARIAMNE.** Speak not of premonition and foreboding
But speak of fear alone! You quaked at that
Which you deserved! That is the way of man!
You can no longer trust the sister, since you
Have put to death the brother; you have done
Most frightful things to me and now you think
I must reply, yes, even must outdo you!
No? Or did you, when you were facing death
In honest open warfare, always station
A hangman right behind me? You are silent?
It's well. Since you yourself do feel so deeply
What is most fitting for me, since your fear
Instructs me what my duty is, so then
I finally fulfill this sacred duty,
And separate myself from you forever!

**HEROD.** Answer! Do you confess? Or do you not?

**MARIAMNE (is silent).**

**HEROD (to the judges).**

You see, there is no frank confession! Also
I do not have the proof you like to have!
But once you did condemn a murderer
To death because one of his victim's jewels
Was found on him. It was of no avail
To show his hands, which he had washed so clean,
Nor yet to swear the dead man's jewel had been
A gift; you had the sentence carried out!
It stands the same way here! She has a jewel,
An evidence, more incontestible
For me than any human tongue could give,
That she is guilty of the sin of sins.  
A miracle would not have merely happened,  
It would have had to be repeated, were it  
Not so, and miracles are not repeated!

MARIAMNE (moves as if to speak).

HEROD. Yes, she will say, just as the murderer said:
It had been given her! And she may risk it,
For like a forest, bedrooms too are mute.
But if you should be tempted to believe her
Then all my inmost feelings contradict you
And every explanation possible is
Against you too, and I demand her death.
In truth, her death! I do not want to drain
The loathsome cup defiance offers me,
Nor to torment myself from day to day
With wondering whether such defiance is
The most unpleasant face of innocence, or
The boldest mask of sin.

For like a forest, bedrooms too are mute.
But if you should be tempted to believe her
Then all my inmost feelings contradict you
And every explanation possible is
Against you too, and I demand her death.
In truth, her death! I do not want to drain
The loathsome cup defiance offers me,
Nor to torment myself from day to day
With wondering whether such defiance is
The most unpleasant face of innocence, or
The boldest mask of sin.

So speak then! Do not sit like Solomon
Between the mothers with the two young babes!
The case is clear! To judge, you need no more
Than what you see! A woman, who can stand there
As she does, merits death and were she free
From every guilt! And still you do not speak?
Do you perhaps first want the proof, how firmly
I am persuaded that she has deceived me?
I give it to you with Soemus' head,
And that at once! (he turns to Joab)

TITUS (rises). I don't call this a court!
Pardon! (he is about to go)

MARIAMNE. No, Roman, stay, I recognize it!
And who will challenge it, if I do not!
(Titus sits down again, Alexandra stands up, Mariamne steps up to her, in an undertone)

You have brought sorrow to me, never have
You judged your happiness in terms of mine!
If I'm to pardon that, keep silence now!
You will not alter what I have resolved!
(Alexandra sits down)

Well, judges?

AARON (to the rest). Any one of you who thinks
The King's decree unjust, let him arise!
(all remain sitting)
So you have all decreed that she shall die!

_hes stands up_

You are condemned to death, my Queen!—Have you
Aught else you wish to say? 2930

MARIAMNE. Unless the hangman
Has had his orders in advance, already
Is waiting for me with the axe, I wish
To speak with Titus yet, before I die.
_(to Herod) It is the custom to allow a wish_
To one about to die. If you can grant it,
Then let my life be added to your own!

HEROD. The hangman has no orders yet—I can!
And since you promise me eternity
As my reward for that, I must and will!
_(to Titus) Is not this woman terrible?_ 2940

TITUS. She stands
Before a man, as woman never should!
So make an end of it!

SALOME _steps forward_. Oh do! Your mother
Is sick and close to death! She will recover
When she has heard this!

HEROD _to Alexandra_. Did you not say something?
ALEXANDRA. No! 2945
_(Herod looks long at Mariamne who remains silent)_

HEROD. _Die! (to Joab) I put it in your hands!_
_(exit rapidly, Salome follows)_

ALEXANDRA _looking after him_. For you
I have another barb! _(to Mariamne) That was your wish!
MARIAMNE. I thank you! _(exit Alexandra)_

AARON _to the other judges_. Shall we still not try to bring
Him to relent? For this is horrible!
She is the last of all the Maccabees!
If we could but obtain a brief delay!
It would not do directly to oppose him
But he himself may soon again be different,
And it may be that he will punish us
Because today we offered no resistance!
So come! _(exeunt)_ 2955

JOAB _to Mariamne_. Will you forgive? I must obey!
MARIAMNE. Do what your master ordered, do it quickly!
I shall be ready just as soon as you
Yourself, and queen, as you know, do not wait! _(exit Joab)_

SCENE 6

MARIAMNE _steps up to Titus_.
Just one word more before I go to sleep,
While my last chamberlain prepares the bed! 2960
ACT V, SCENE 6

You are astonished, as I see, that I
Direct this word to you and not my mother,
But she is almost like a stranger to me.

TITUS. I am amazed to have a woman show me
How as a man I have someday to die!
Yes, Queen, your actions seem to me uncanny,
And, I will not deny, your nature too,
Only I must admire the heroic spirit
Which lets you leave this life as if the world
With all its beauty seemed not even worth
Another hasty glance on your last walk;
This courage almost reconciles me with you!

MARIAMNE. It is not courage!

To be sure, they say
It is a teaching of your gloomy Pharisees
That life does not begin till after death,
And all those who believe with them despise
The world in which the sun alone shines on
And everything besides dies out in night!

MARIAMNE. I never listened to them, I do not
Believe it! No, I know what I am leaving!

TITUS. Then you stand there, as scarcely Caesar did
When Brutus' hand had thrust the dagger home,
For he, too proud to let his pain be seen,
And yet not strong enough to stifle it,
In falling covered up his face; but you
Are keeping it concealed within your breast!

MARIAMNE. No more! No more! It is not as you think!
No longer do I suffer pain, for life
Is part of pain and life within me has
Become extinct, I long have been halfway
Between a person and a shadow, and
I scarcely understand just how I still
Can die. Now hear the things I have to say,
But first you promise me as man and Roman
That you will keep it silent till I'm gone,
That you will stay beside me when I go.
You hesitate? Do I demand too much?
It's not because I fear to stumble, and whether
You later speak or whether you keep silent,
Decide yourself! In nothing do I bind you,
I even let my wish go unexpressed.
This is the reason I have chosen you:
Because you always in the past have watched
Our Hell aloof and cold, just as a statue
Of bronze might look upon a burning city.
When you give evidence, they must believe;
We are for you a different race, to which
No bond attaches you, you speak of us
As we do of exotic plants and stones,
Impartially and without love or hate!

TITUS. You go too far!

MARIAMNE. If you unyielding now
Refuse your word, my secret goes with me
Into the grave, and then I must forego
The consolation that one human breast
Preserves my image pure and undefiled
And that, if hatred dares its worst, he then
From sense of duty and respect for truth
Can lift the veil that hides it from the others!

TITUS. I yield! I promise it to you!

MARIAMNE. So know then
That I deceived the King, but not as he
Believes! I was as loyal to him as he
Himself. But why revile myself? More loyal,
He is long since another than he was:
Do I need to affirm that? I should rather
Decide to swear that I had hands and feet.
For I could lose both hands and feet and yet
I should still be just what I am, but I
Could not lose heart and soul!

TITUS. Yes I believe you
And I will—

MARIAMNE. Keep what you have promised me!
I have no doubt! Now ask yourself just what
I felt, when he placed me a second time
Beneath the sword: I had forgiven him once,
When I was forced to think: Your shadow is
More like you, than the so distorted picture
Of you he carries in his deepest soul!
That was too much, I could not stand it longer!
I reached down for my dagger and, restrained
From sudden suicide, I swore to him:
You plan to be my hangman if you die,
You shall become my hangman, but in life!
You shall now put to death the wife you saw
And after death shall see me as I am!—
You saw me at the feast. Well then: a mask
Was dancing there!

TITUS. Ah!

MARIAMNE. And today a mask stood
Before the Court, and for a mask the axe
Is being ground, but falling it strikes me!

TITUS. You move me deeply, Queen, and I accuse you
Of nothing wrong, but I must say to you:
I was myself deceived, for at your feast
ACT V, SCENE 6

You filled me with a horror and aversion
As now with shuddering thrills of admiration.
If that was the effect on me, why should not
The glamor of your mask have blinded him
Whose heart, so stirred by ardent feeling, was
As little able as a turbid stream
To mirror things exactly as they are.
I feel deep sympathy for him as well
And so I find your vengeance too severe!

MARIAMNE. I take my vengeance at my own expense;
If dying like a sacrificial beast
Incensed me so, I now show it was not
Because of life; I throw my life away!

TITUS. Release me from my promise!

MARIAMNE. If you broke it,
You would not change a thing. A man
Can have another put to death; the strongest
Can not compel the weakest to live on.
And I am tired, I even envy stones,
And if it is the purpose of this life,
That one shall learn to hate it, to prefer
Eternal death to life, that purpose was
Attained in me. Oh would that they might carve
My coffin out of never-crumbling granite
And sink it deep beneath the sea, so that
Throughout eternity my very dust
Be kept apart from all the elements!

TITUS. But we are living in a world of pretence!
MARIAMNE. I see that now, so I am leaving it!
TITUS. And I myself gave evidence against you!
MARIAMNE. I asked you to the feast, so that you would!
TITUS. And if I told him now, what you have told me—
MARIAMNE. He then would call me back, I have no doubt!
If I turned back, then my reward would be
That from that moment I should have to stand
In fear of any who approached, and say:
Take care, for that can be your third dread hangman!
No, Titus, no, it was not mere dissembling,
For me there's no return. And if there were,
Do you not think I would have found it out
When I took leave forever from my children?
If mere defiance drove me, as he thinks,
My children's sorrow would have broken it:
Now sorrow only makes my death more bitter!

TITUS. Oh, if he felt that, came himself and fell
Down at your feet!

MARIAMNE. Yes! That would show that he
Had overcome the demon and I could
Tell everything to him! For I ought not
To stoop to bargain with him for a life
Which, by the very price at which it can
Be bought, must lose for me its every value;
I should reward him for his victory, and
Believe me, I could do it!

TITUS. Herod, do you
Not feel it?

Joab comes in noiselessly and stands there silent.

MARIAMNE. No! You see, he sends me him! (points to Joab)

TITUS. Let me—

MARIAMNE. Did you not understand me, Titus?
In your eyes is it mere defiance still
That seals my lips? Can I continue living?
Can I continue living with a man
Who does not honor God's own image in me?
And if the very fact that I kept silent
Could conjure death, provide the weapon for him,
Should I now break my silence? Should I merely
Exchange one type of dagger for another?
And would it have been more?

TITUS. She is quite right!

MARIAMNE (to Joab). Well, are you ready? (Joab bows)

MARIAMNE (toward Herod's chambers). Herod, farewell to you!
(toward the earth) To you, Aristobulus, my fond greetings!
Soon I shall join you in eternal night!

She goes to the door. Joab opens it. Armed men visible
standing at attention. She goes out. Titus follows.
Joab last. Solemn pause.

SCENE 7

Salome enters.

SALOME. She went! And still my heart does not beat faster!
Another sign that she deserved her fate.
So finally again I have my brother,
My mother has her son! It's well I did
Not budge from him. For otherwise the judges
Might still have changed his mind. No, Aaron, no!
Imprisonment! She would not stay in prison
A month. The grave alone will hold her fast,
For only for the grave has he no key.

SCENE 8

A SERVANT. Three kings have come here from the Orient
And bring with them rich loads of precious gifts,
They have arrived this very moment, never
Before have eyes beheld more foreign shapes
Nor more amazing costumes here than these!

SALOME. Have them come in! (exit servant)

I will at once announce them.

While they are here with him he will not think

Of her! And soon all will be over with her!

(she goes in to Herod)

_The servant brings in the three kings, strangely clothed but
different from one another. They are accompanied by a
rich retinue similarly clothed. Gold, frankincense and
myrrh. Herod enters with Salome immediately after._

FIRST KING. Hail King to you!
SECOND KING. And blessed is your house!
THIRD KING. Glorified in all eternity!
HEROD. Thank you! But for this hour your greeting seems

Quite strange to me!
FIRST KING. Was not a son just born

To you?
HEROD. To me? Oh no! My wife has died!
FIRST KING. Then this is not the place for us!
SECOND KING. There is

A second king besides you here!
HEROD. There would

Be none here then.
THIRD KING. Besides your own there is

A second royal family in the land!
HEROD. But why?
FIRST KING. Then it is so!
SECOND KING. It must be so!
HEROD. I do not know of one!
SALOME (to Herod).

In Bethlehem,

They say, a branch of David's race has been

Preserved!
THIRD KING. And David was a king?
HEROD. He was!
FIRST KING. Then let us go on down to Bethlehem!
SALOME (continuing to Herod).

But his descendants there are only beggars!
HEROD. That I believe! Else—
SALOME.

Once I saw a maid

Of David's house and spoke with her, her name

Was Mary. She was beautiful enough

And was betrothed, but to a carpenter,

She scarcely lifted up her eyes toward me

When I was asking for her name!
HEROD. You hear?
SECOND KING. It matters not, we go!
HEROD. But will you tell,

Before you go, what brings you here?
FIRST KING.  Respect
For Him the King of Kings!
SECOND KING.  And the desire
To see Him face to face before we die!
THIRD KING.  The sacred duty to do homage to Him
By laying at His feet the precious things
Of earth!
HEROD.  But who told you of Him?
FIRST KING.  His star!
We did not start together, had no knowledge
Of one another, and our realms lie far
Apart in East and West, and there are seas
Between them and high mountains cut them off—
SECOND KING.  But all of us had seen the selfsame star,
The same desire had seized all three of us.
We traveled by the selfsame route and here
We came together at the selfsame goal—
THIRD KING.  And whether He be son of king or beggar,
The Child for whom this star shines out on life,
Will be exalted high, and on the earth
No man will breathe who does not bow to Him!
HEROD (to himself).
The ancient book predicts that too! ( aloud) May I
Supply a guide for you to Bethlehem?
FIRST KING (pointing to the sky).
We have one!
HEROD.  Good—when you have found the child,
Will you be sure to send me word of it
So that I can, like you, pay homage to it?
FIRST KING.  We will! And now away to Bethlehem!
(exeunt kings and retinue)
HEROD.  They will not do it!
(enter Joab and Titus followed by Alexandra)
HEROD.  Ah!
JOAB.  It has been done!
(Herod covers his face.)
TITUS.  She died. That's true. But I now have a task,
A task more terrible by far than he
Performed who carried out your bloody sentence:
I have to tell you, she was innocent.
HEROD.  No, Titus, no!
(Titus starts to speak. Herod steps up to him.)
If that were so, then you
Would not have let her die.
TITUS.  That no one could
Have hindered but yourself!—It gives me pain
That I must be for you far worse than hangman.
If it's a sacred duty to inter
The dead, whoever he may be, then surely
To clear him from disgrace, if he does not
Deserve it, is a duty still more sacred,
And now this duty falls on me alone!

HEROD. In all you say I only see one thing:
Even in death her charm was true to her!
Why still feel rancor toward Soemus! How
Could he resist her: glamor while she lived!
About to die, she still enflamed your heart!

TITUS. Does jealousy extend beyond the grave?

HEROD. If I were wrong and if behind your words
Lay something other than a sympathy
That is too deep to be no more than that:
I should remind you still, your evidence
Had its full share in helping to condemn her,
And so you would have been in duty bound
To warn me, when you felt the slightest doubt!

TITUS. My word prevented me and more than that!
A harsh, inexorable necessity.
If I had moved a single step from her
She would have taken her own life at once,
I saw the dagger hid upon her breast,
I saw her hand start toward it more than once.
(pause) She planned to die, she had to die, for she
Had suffered just as much, forgiven just
As much as she could suffer or forgive.
I saw deep down into her inmost soul.
Who asks for more should not find fault with her,
His quarrel's only with the elements
Which were so mixed in her that she could go
No further. But let him show me the woman
Who ever went as far as she had gone!

(HEROD moves restlessly)

She wanted death from you and at her feast
She called into deceptive life that ugly
And fatal phantom of your jealousy
And thus deceived us all with an illusion.
I found it harsh but not unjust. She showed
Herself to you as mask, a mask intended
To prod you, make you draw your sword against her,

(he points to Joab)

You did and you yourself put her to death!

HEROD. She said that. But she spoke that way from vengeance!

TITUS. She said it. I gave evidence against her,
How I should like to doubt it!

HEROD. And Soemus?

TITUS. I met him on his way to death, he was
About to start on his when she had finished
Hers, and it seemed to be a comfort to him
That his blood would be mixed so soon with hers
If only on the block by hangman's hand.

HEROD. Ah! You see!

TITUS. What? It may be that he glowed
For her in secret. But if that was sin,
Then it was his, not hers. He called to me:
I die, because I spoke, but otherwise
I should have had to die because I could
Speak. That was Joseph's lot! He swore to me
In dying, that he was as innocent as I!—
I noted that!

HEROD. Is Joseph too avenged?
The earth is opening up? Do all the dead
Step forth?

ALEXANDRA. They do!—No! Do not fear! There was
A queen. She will remain below, I'm sure!

HEROD. Accurst—
(controls himself) So be it! Even if Soemus
Committed only one offense against me—
(turning to Salome)
Joseph, who filled him with this base suspicion,
Joseph though facing death was lying to him,
Or no? Joseph—Why are you silent now?

SALOME. He dogged her every step—

ALEXANDRA (to Herod). I know, but yet
He only sought the opportunity,
And that is sure, to carry out your order
To kill both her and me—

HEROD. Is that the truth?
(to Salome) And you? you?—

ALEXANDRA. Almost in the very hour:
When he completely dropped the mask he wore
Then Mariamne made a solemn oath
To kill herself with her own hand if you
Did not return. I will not hide it from you,
I hated her for that!

HEROD. Oh! Terrible!
And that—you tell me only now?

ALEXANDRA. I do!

TITUS. I know that too, it was her parting word,
A thousand years I would have kept it silent,
I wanted to clear her, not torture you!

HEROD. Oh then—(his voice fails him)

TITUS. Control yourself, it hits me too!

HEROD. Yes you—and her (toward Salome)—and everyone who was,
As I, the blind tool of malicious fate,
But I alone have lost what on the earth
Will not be seen in all eternity
Again! Lost? Oh!
ALEXANDRA. Aristobulus! Now
You are avenged, my son, and I in you!
HEROD. You triumph? Do you believe that I shall now
Collapse? Oh no, I shall not go to pieces!
I am a king and will see to it that

(he makes a motion as if he were breaking something)
The world feels it!—Up then Pharisees,
Rebel against me now! (to Salome) You, why are you
Retreating from me now? As yet I have
No different face, but it can happen by tomorrow
That even my own mother has to swear
That I am not her son!

(after a pause—with hollow voice)
And if my crown
Were set with all the stars that flame on high,
For Mariamne I would give them all,
And if I had it, give the world besides.
Yes, I would even lay myself alive
Within the grave, just as I am, if I,
By doing that, could set her free from hers,
Yes, I would dig the grave with my own hands!
I can not do that! Therefore I hold fast
To what I have and keep on holding fast!
It is not much but with it is a crown
Which now must take the place of wife and queen.
And if one grasps for that — — But someone does,
A boy is doing it, the wonder child
Of whom the prophets long since spoke to us
And for whom now a star shines out on life.
But, Fate, your error was a grievous one
If you had thought to smooth the way for him
By trampling me beneath your brazen feet,
I am a soldier, I will fight against you
And still will bruise your heel though lying prone!
(quickly) Joab! (Joab stops forward)
You go today to Bethlehem
And tell the captain who is in command there
To take the wonder boy—But he will not
Know where to seek, not all can see the star,
These kings are quite as false as they are pious—
Tell him to kill the children on the spot,
All children who were born in this last year,
Not one of them must stay alive!

Joab (steps back). It's well!
   (to himself) And I know why! But Moses still was saved
   In spite of Pharaoh!

Herod (still loud and strong). I shall check tomorrow!
   Today there's Mariamne—(he collapses) Titus!
   (Titus catches him)

FINIS