

H

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"Woe to the generation whose judges deserve to be judged!"
Talmuc

CHARACTERS:**ANTIPATER****HEAD BLACKSMITH****HERODIAS****HEROD****MOTHER****Assasins, Guards, Spies, Tribunal and Soldiers.****SETTING:****Herod's palace**

NOTE: The stage direction "*Infinitude*" indicates a collision of time and space. Open to interpretation by each production.

ACT ONE**Scene 1**

A palace of steel. Large hall. Midnight. Two men meet in the middle.

Guard 1: Shhh. Herod sleeps.

Guard 2: Lower your voice. He's not sleeping. At midnight, he ordered us to call the blacksmith.

Guard 1: What did he tell him?

Guard 2: No one knows, but he fears something.

Guard 1: His spies patrol the provinces, what are they looking for?

Guard 2: Shhh. Speak lower. He's killed two of his sons already – what isn't he capable of?

Guard 1: Antipater's all he's got now.

Infinite.

Guard 2: How long have you gone without sleeping?

Guard 1: For two nights I've kept watch at his door.

From the bedchamber:

Voice of Herod: My sons, is that you?

Guard 2: No, sir. It's us.

Voice of Herod: I can't hear.

Guard 2: Your guards, Sir.

Voice of Herod: Are you shouting at me? You want to betray me, don't you?

Guard 2: Us? No, of course not. We watch out for you like...

Guard 1: Our own back.

Assasin 1 and Assasin 2 enter behind Guards.

Voice of Herod: Even your own left hand wields a sword. A word of advice: fear it.

Assasin 1 and Assasin 2 cut Guards' throats from behind.

Scene 2

Assasins wipe blood from their weapons.

Assasin 1: Done, Sir. The traitors are dead.

Voice of Herod: How are you so sure?

Assasin 1: From his chest.

Voice of Herod: *(Clears throat.)* And what does that mean?

Assasin 2: That they're not breathing.

Voice of Herod: *(Clears throat.)* You're not lying?

Assasin 1: Why?

Voice of Herod: Maybe you want the same thing.

Assasin 2: Us?

Assasin 1 finishes off Guard 2, who lets out a final cry.

Voice of Herod: What was that?

Assasin 2: I made sure he was dead.

Voice of Herod: So, he was still alive?

Assasin 1: No. Mortally wounded.

Voice of Herod: But he wasn't...?

Assasin 1: I mean...

Assasin 2: I thought...

Antipater enters behind Assasins.

Voice of Herod: He wasn't... How can I have faith in anyone? I cannot even trust assassins.

Antipater executes the Assasins for treason.

Scene 3

Antipater sheaths his sword.

Voice of Herod: Is it done?

Antipater: Done.

Voice of Herod: How nice. I trust only you, because you are... Now I'll be able to rest.

Silence.

Antipater: Did you fall asleep?

Infinitude.

Antipater: Finally. *(Pause)* And was it because of me?

Voice of Herod: You think you're my protector? *(Tose más).*

Antipater: *(Retreats.)* I didn't say that.

Voice of Herod: But you think it.

Antipater: No.

Antipater flees.

Voice of Herod: Come. Come close... *(Pause)* I'm still waiting... *(Infinitude.)* Why don't you come to me? Do you fear me too? You shouldn't fear your own father. Guards? Guards, he escaped.

Scene 4

Empty hall.

Voice of Herod: (*Whispers.*) Half a child for each mother... But there is not always a half. I am no Solomon. I decree the new law, yet I am no Moses either.

Head Blacksmith crosses the room, stays just outside the bedchamber.

Head Blacksmith: Sir, did you call for me?

Voice of Herod: Do we know each other? Were you with me last night?

Head Blacksmith: Tonight, Sir.

Voice of Herod: This same night? I see, excuse me – I was delirious.

Head Blacksmith: It's not my place to judge your orders.

Voice of Herod: I don't even remember what I asked you for.

Head Blacksmith: It doesn't matter any more, Sir.

Voice of Herod: Don't pay me any mind in the middle of the night. Use your judgement, that's why you're the Head Blacksmith.

Head Blacksmith: We were working all night long.

Voice of Herod: Forget everything. It was just a fever. It's not important.

Head Blacksmith: May I leave?

Voice of Herod: Go on, go and rest. You can barely stay standing.

Empty hall. Head Blacksmith crosses it and exits.

Escena 5

Empty hall. We hear delicate steps.

Voice of Herod: Wife?

Herodias crosses the hall and goes into the bedchamber. Herod enters the hall, leaning on her.

Herod: Help me to sit.

Herodias seats him on the throne of steel, from which he will not move from now on.

Herodias: Where is my son?

Herod: He escaped.

Herodias: Don't you dare...

Herod: I said he escaped.

Herodias: He's the only one I have left.

Herod: I already ordered a search.

Herodias: We have to...

Soldier enters.

Soldier: Sir.

Herod: Do you know anything yet?

Soldier: Yes...

Herod: Finally.

Soldier: He's not born yet, but it won't be past tonight.

Herod: Who told you?

Soldier: The spies.

Herod: And where will he be born?

Soldier: Not far. We must act quickly, before dawn.

Herod: But how?

Soldier: Thirty were just born. There aren't many.

Herod: I cannot decree something like that.

Herodias: And what you did to me?

Infinite.

Herodias: This is also for us. Be fair.

Herod: Fair? There must be another solution.

Herodias: We have no other way.

Herod: No. Wait... A trial.

Herodias: Trial?

Herod: Yes – if I can condemn one and show that he deserves death, I can condemn the others without guilt.

Herodias: But why?

Herod: Because he who judges can also be judged.

Herodias: This isn't necessary. You have the power.

Herod: Silence, woman. After what happened in our own home, I can do it no other way. Soldier, pick a child at random from the town and bring him before me, quickly.

Soldier exits.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

Soldier enters holding a baby roughly.

Herod: Treat him as if he were your own. We still do not know if he's guilty.

A Mother enters behind him.

Herod: Woman?

Mother: ...

Herod: You are allowed to speak. Speak.

Mother: Sir.

Herod: What are you doing here?

Mother: I know nothing, but this is my son.

Herod: What have you come for?

Mother: He's done nothing, sir... He's mine.

Herod: We know.

Mother: What? So, you know who I am?

Herod: No, and it doesn't matter. He's the one we want.

Mother: So it wasn't a mistake?

Herod: No. He stands accused.

Mother: Of what?

Herod: When he grows up... He could become a threat.

Mother: Sir, he's mine. Look at me, I do not produce great men. My son will be just another man. What more could he be?

Herod: Woman, nothing is proven. We could find him innocent and he would be freed immediately, you have my word.

Mother: And who will defend him?

Herod: Pick the wisest man in the court.

Mother: I pick you.

Herod: Impossible, woman. I will take the other side. His accuser.

Mother: My son accused by the King?

Herod: I will not be King during the trial.

Mother: And who would oppose you?

Herod: ...

Mother: Only a mother.

Herod: Woman, you are surrounded by wise men. They will do it better.

Mother: But they feel nothing for him.

Herod: So then who should defend him?

Mother: She who bore him.

Herod: You?

Mother: I demand that right. I am responsible for him.

Herod: As I am for my people.

Herodias: Woman, reconsider...

Herod: You won't withstand the pressure of a trial like this.

Mother: I endured a birth.

Herod: You would debate me. I come from a caste of Kings.

Mother: And I from a wiser and more ancient species.

Herod: Are you sure of your decision?

Mother affirms.

Herod: All right, woman... If you wish it so. Only one condition. No tears. If you let a single one fall, you will be stripped of your defense.

Mother: I accept.

Herod rises to his feet.

Herod: Here only Reason matters, and the verdict is subject to this standard.

Tribunal affirms this.

Tribunal: Here, here!

Herod: The trial is ready to begin. *(To Mother)* What is his name?

Mother: He doesn't have one yet.

Herod: Don't you think it's time to name him?

Mother: What for?

Herod: Name him.

Mother: I will call him...*(Pause)* Herod. Yes. Herod, in your honor.

Herod: You cannot name him after me.

Mother: There is no law against it.

Herod: And why my name?

Mother: Every time you mention it you'll remember your own fate.

Herod: Woman, the child and I are two.

Mother: No. From today on your destiny is one.

Herod: Fine – call him however you please. It's irrelevant. In that case...

(Pause)

Herod, your trial must now begin.

Mother: What is he accused of, Sir?

Herod: Of wickedness.

Mother: So early in his life?

Herod: There is no such thing as young wickedness, woman. It arrives with us, it accompanies us since birth.

Mother: Then the guilty one is me. Judge me.

Herod: No, woman, it's not that wickedness we are debating, but the child's.

Mother: But he is innocent, Sir.

Herod: How are you so sure?

Mother: I am his warden.

Herod: And he has not committed a single offense?

Mother: Living.

Herod: No one can be blamed for that.

Mother: But it's the price he'll pay.

Herod: Let us be clear: even if found guilty, he might not be condemned to death. Don't get ahead of yourself.

Mother: He was just born, and he could spend the rest of his life in a dungeon?

Herod: I haven't said that either, woman. First let us examine his crime, later his sentence.

Mother: I suspect it has already been decided.

Herod: They used to call that fate.

Mother: Then let's go back to predestiny.

Herod: Explain that, woman.

Mother: The second before a decision is made, you must know how to recognize the moment, the breach, and it is now.

Herod: (*Whispers.*) I feel like I've lived this already.

Mother: If he is condemned, I fear that he who shares his name will suffer the same fate.*

Herod: I do not understand someone who defends her son in this way.

Mother: Nor I someone who in this way defends his people.

Infinite.

Mother: And if you were him? If they had killed you at this age, what would you not have accomplished?

Herod: You want me to judge myself? That's easy – the declaration of the new law, of which your people should be proud.

Mother: But also this trial. Weigh your actions in the balance: the new law or my son. Choose the one you deserve to be judged by.

Herod: What strange premonitions.

Mother: I speak from mother to mother.

Herodias is disturbed.

Herod: Me a mother?

Mother: A verdict grows inside you, but you could still abort. Predestiny, Sir, choose it.

Herod: Again that feeling?

Thunder and lightning outside.

Mother: Lightning.

Herod: What?

Mother: Do you know what it means? It foretells a schism in time. Choose now.

Herod has a coughing attack. All those present assist him, but it gets worse. Herodias gives him wine to drink.

Herod: *(Recovering.)* I remember something from my childhood – tell me, how does he suckle?

Mother: Suckle? Like anyone else.

Herod: Have you felt how he sucks at your breast?

Mother: Of course.

Herod: And there's nothing suspicious?

Mother: No.

Herod: Show it.

Mother shows one.

Herod: The other one. (*Mother uncovers the other breast.*) Confess. Why were you hiding it?

Mother: I wasn't.

Herod: There is the evidence.

Mother: Evidence?

Herod: The child sucks more from that breast, or am I wrong?

Mother: He does.

Herod: And you ask about his crime?

Mother: I don't understand.

Herod: You can't see it? Wickedness is already in his nature.

Mother: What wickedness?

Herod: Don't you realize it? He is voracious and he doesn't even have teeth yet. Look at your nipple. You're hurt. He is no child, he is a wolf.

Mother: No, he has never eaten more than he should.

Herod: And what proof do you have? I, on the other hand, have your breast.

Mother: The proof is also in me. I am the limit.

Herod: Limit of what?

Mother: Of his hunger. A child can feed from his mother without committing a crime.

Herodias is beginning to understand.

Herodias: (To Herod.) I'm not sure we should continue.

Herod: (To Mother.) Are you saying a mother is no more than meat for her child? [*only a meal for her child*]? The world would be filled with cannibals.

Mother: It is full of some already.

The baby starts to cry.

Herod: Why is he crying, woman?

Mother: He's hungry.

Herod: So why don't you tend to him? Then I can prove my point. Show us how he eats.

Mother: No... Not in front of everyone... Not now.

Herod: Then how will you support your argument? (*No response.*) Feed him.

Mother shakes her head 'No.'

Herod: Or we will force you.

They bring the child close to the Mother.

Herod: How can we measure whether his hunger is appropriate, Tribunal?

Mother: (*Loses control.*) Compare it with the gluttony of the tyrant.

Herod: Are you referring to me? I am not the subject of this trial.

Mother: Who is being judged?

Herod: Your son.

Mother: And his name?

Herod: Herod. (*He coughs*) Are you implying that I suck your people dry? Well then – this is the measure of my hands. (*He coughs more*).

The child cries more.

Herod: I propose something. Feed him while sand is poured into this container (*he intertwines his hands to form a cavity*). When it overflows I will close them, and by then the child must have stopped eating.

Soldier hands Mother the child.

Herod: His stomach cannot be larger than my hands. Let it be measure for measure.

Mother uncovers her breast and brings the child close, who begins to nurse. The Guard slowly pours a stream of sand into the cavity of Herod's hands.

Herod: The time is up. (*He closes his full hands*) Pull him away.

As the child is separated from his Mother, he starts to cry.

Herod: He was just born and already he is insatiable. How much power will he desire once he is grown? Tribunal, it has been proven. Herod is capable of voraciousness.

Tribunal agrees.

Tribuno: Herod, the people find you guilty.

Mother: Such injustice.

Herod: Injustice, woman? I could have killed your son and all the others without the need for a trial.

Mother: The others?

Herod: Your son condemned twenty-nine others. A joint indictment. His whole generation.

Mother: And who will decide the sentence?

Tribuno: Justice incarnate: our King.

Mother: You? (*Kneeling*). King, I beg that the punishment be just. Please.

Silence.

Soldier: *(In Herod's hear.)* Little time is left til dawn.

Mother: Mercy.

Herodias: It's here, woman...

Soldier: It will be easier in the shadows.

Herodias: Wait...

Mother: Justice.

Herodias: Listen. Kill the others, but pardon just this one.

Soldier: Hurry, Sir.

Herod: Herod...

Herodias: No.

The court becomes agitated.

Herod: I sentence you to death.

Herodias, terrified, wants to leave.

Mother: What? The decision was made already?

Herod: Your defense was admirable, woman.

Mother: But what good was it?

Mother wrestles with the Soldier for her son.

Mother: A pardon, sir. Believe me, there's nothing kingly about him. Look at him.

Herodias starts to leave.

Herod: Wife.

Infinitude.

Herodias: Not again. You killed our own sons too. And what proof did you have?

Herod: Woman...

Herodias: Tell me what proof?

Herod: Weapons were found in their bedroom.

Herodias: I was on your side but...what proof did you have?

Herod: They would wake up in the middle of the night. Didn't they often speak of power?

Herodias: I said proof.

Herod: They used to prowl around.

Infinitude.

Herod: Only...

Herodias: Proof?

Herod: Only... Intuition.

Infinitude.

Herodias: From this moment on... You are alone. I am not your accomplice, not ever your witness.

Herodias leaves.

Mother: (*Wrestling for her son.*) Please, Sir. Look at him. Is this the face of someone who can rule over thousands?

Herod: Do it now.

Mother: No. No one touch him. (*seizes the child from Soldier*) If he must die, let me be the one to do it.

Herod: What are you saying, woman? There are hands better trained for that – they will do it more delicately.

Mother: But no one like me.

Herod: Woman, what do you know of killing?

Mother: I know when he is about to cry and when he is hungry. I can determine the exact amount of force so he will not suffer.

Herod: Let her go.

Soldier retreats.

Herod: Are you sure?

Mother nods.

Herod: Let her pick her weapon.

Mother: Weapon?

Herod: Give her the weapon, quickly. It should be done before me.

Soldier: We have swords, lances, daggers...

Mother: I don't want one.

Herod: Woman, for this it is necessary.

Mother: I bring it with me.

Herod: Where?

Mother: Here.

Herod: Your breast?

Mother: Let him eat for the last time. I will press him to me until his breathing stops.

Silence.

Herod: Woman, I just saw him finish eating. If he rejects your breast he will prove me wrong. If it is so, I will pardon his life.

Mother uncovers her breast, brings her child to it, who nurses.