

JEHU

A Play by Gilad Evron

CHARACTERS:

Jehu..... King of Israel

Zilpah..... Widow of Yehoram, the previous king

Ziff..... The chief minister

Keturah.... Ziff's daughter

Azgad..... An officer

Maachah.... Azgad's old wife

1st Soldier

2nd Soldier

SCENE ONE

(In the middle of the center stage there is a large square of marble flooring framed by an ornamental edge. It is surrounded by chairs. The actors enter and sit in the chairs, facing the marble floor. The lights dim out, then come on again.

As the lights come on, Ziff is sitting in the middle of the marble floor, his head swathed in cloth. The heads of Azgad and his wife Maachah are also swathed. The two soldiers are scraping and cleaning the floor.

Keturah rises from the chair and enters the marble square.)

Keturah: Father. Father. Father. Do you hear me father?

(She removes the swathe from her father's head. At the same time, Azgad and Maachah also remove the swathes from their heads.)

Keturah: He spoke to me, father. He doesn't believe that you are sick, that you lost your memory, father. He doesn't understand. He won't accept your condition.

Ziff: Chair. This is a chair.

Keturah: Enough, father! I'm your daughter, remember?

Ziff: Good woman...

Keturah: You carried me in your arms. You blew in my face and said it's the wind, remember? You will remember, father, for my sake. You won't let them kill your child, father. You love your little girl and she loves you.

Ziff: this is a chair. A table stands. A chair sits.

Keturah: Your little one, remember? Remember when I was lost on the way to Hebron, and you and mother thought that your baby was gone forever, that I was dead? And when I came back you beat me

and almost killed me again? Your little one, father, remember?

Ziff: Small chair. Big table.

Keturah: Enough, father! Even a cow, a stupid cow smiling on her way to the slaughterhouse, even she, with no memory, with no thought, feels for her calf. She recognizes her future, father, you sequel, father.

Ziff: A chair!

(Ziff stands up. For a moment it seems that he regains his memory. But then he sits down again determinedly.)

Ziff: A chair!

(Keturah, in fury and despair, pulls the chair from under him. She flings it to the ground and it disintegrates.)

Keturah: And now what? What is it now?

(The two soldiers stop working. They also watch the proceedings, wiping their hands.)

Keturah: Now what do you see? A chair? A table? What?
What are you trying to solve there, in your head?

(She pounces on him, trying to pry his eyelids open with her fingers.)

Keturah: I see you, father, I see you, coiled deep down inside.
Come father, I'll baby you...

(She wraps her cloak around him.)

Keturah: Once more you will become the chief minister of the realm. Kings will come to visit you, and everything will return to be as it has always been. We shall remember everything and in the evenings we will sit together counting stars. Come, father, come with me.

(She tries to pull Ziff with her, but he doesn't respond. She sees the two soldiers approaching and retreats beyond the limits of the marble square, resuming her seat.)

1st soldier: What's so hot about memory, your Excellency?
What's the big deal about it for an Excellency?

2nd soldier: You do remember, your Excellency... you remember very well.

1st soldier: Memory is everything, your Excellency. It's all the women you've ever had.

2nd soldier: It's Mommy and Poppy.

1st soldier: It's all those who died.

2nd soldier: And only you survived, because you remember all those who died.

1st soldier: memory is also a chair, your Excellency. Even a chair.

2nd soldier: Fact is, you remember: a chair.

1st soldier: What do you need in order to remember?

2nd soldier: Only to be reminded.

1st soldier: Or a punch in the face.

2nd soldier: A kick in the ass.

1st soldier: Please don't make it difficult for us, your Excellency. We also want to remember. For our sake. What are we, after all? A drop in the bucket, a hardly noticed scratch on the surface of events. Scratching one's balls in the palace, scraping the floors, once a month screwing a dressmaker.

2nd soldier: now we're on top, but at one time we were deep in the bottom...

1st soldier: and our memories are so short, your Excellency.

2nd soldier: that's why we're so glad when being reminded.

1st soldier: Ain't it nice to remember, your Excellency? It's important to remember, your Excellency. Isn't it? Isn't it?

(Azgad rises from his seat. The soldiers move Ziff towards him.)

Azgad: Do you remember the day, your honor? If you'd have permitted me to stay until the end, none of this would have happened.

(The soldiers quickly install a table and a chair on the marble flooring.)

1st soldier: Memory is important, you Excellency. Isn't it? Isn't it?

(They hurry towards Jehu, sitting on the side, handcuff him, smear ashes in his face, cover his head with a sack and lift him to his feet.)

Azgad: already on that day I told you, your honor, on the very same day, with the sun still burning on my left cheek after a four days' horse ride from the Gil'ad: Here, I've brought you the butcher of the villagers. The officers had already passed his sentence- hanging, just like any criminal... his head was already rolling, but you, sir, restored his head to his shoulders. Why? Why?... You knew very well what he was. What did you find in him?... How did he come to you? He came with a death sentence on his head! One thing I do know, sir. On that day, if you had permitted me to stay until the end, all this wouldn't have happened... Remember, sir? If I had stayed till the end, all this wouldn't have happened.

SCENE TWO

(The lights change. Music. Ziff moves and stands behind the table, while Azgad takes a stand in front of the table. The two soldiers push Jehu between them, racing him around the marble square. The soldiers drag Jehu into the marble square, throw him down and crouch behind him.)

Azgad: This man, your honor- Jehu, son of Yehoshafat, son of Nimshi, commanding officer of the Gil'ad garrison troops. The army generals have already pronounced their verdict on him. They want his head. But they could not refuse his last request- to have an audience with the king. This is the man. The war against Aram is over, but not for the commander of the Gil'ad garrison. He entered the Aramaean village and massacred 20 villagers, including four women and one child. He chopped each body into three parts, tied the dismembered bodies to horses and drove the horses into the Aramaean villages.

Ziff: I'm listening.

(The soldiers remove Jehu's head swathe)

Ziff: I'm listening, Jehu.

Jehu: With all due respect, your honor, I requested an audience with the king, King Yehoram, with King Yehoram in person.

Ziff: The king can't see you.

Jehu: This is a request of a condemned man, a garrison commander.

Ziff: The king can't see you. What did you want to see him for?

Jehu: I shall speak only with the king, and not in this man's presence.

Ziff: He is the commander of the army.

Jehu: He wanted me to be put on trial. He made sure that I should be sentenced to death. You don't know the hill country, nor does the commander of the army. You live here in Shomron and the king lives in Jezreel. But in the uplands, people are being killed every single day. It's war, your honor, and that's what you wanted to be done.

Ziff: What did we want?

Jehu: You wanted it. You wanted it this way, for all to see. To terrorize them. Isn't it so, your honor? This is what is needed to keep the hill country quiet. Fear is needed. An iron fist of fear. They don't love us up there in the hills, so what is one to do? It's the only way! And you know that this is the only way. The army commander knows it and you know it. Everybody understands that this is what is needed.

Ziff: Did anyone tell you that? Did the army commander order you to do this?

Jehu: This is something you have to sense by yourself... It's in the air.

Ziff: What air?

Jehu: In the air, sir, in the air... people die there every day. Some Aramaean gags on an egg in the morning, He screams “water, water”, and a soldier passing by cuts off his balls. It’s forbidden to shout, its sedition. We want quiet. So what are we to do, hang the soldier? No. A reprimand. You reprimand the soldier. That’s the standard operating procedure, isn’t it, your honor?

Azgad: No, Jehu son of Nimshi.

Jehu: I’m talking to the Chief Minister!... he knows. He understands.

Ziff: You received no order.

Jehu: A hundred I killed in battle, and you haggle with me over these twenty?... I ensured a year’s peace in the hills!

Ziff: You received no order.

Jehu: So it isn’t the pain, the regret, the shame for massacring twenty human beings, but an instruction, an order which didn’t reach me. Because of an order I’m being sentenced to death!

Ziff: You yourself should know better, Jehu. An order is a lot. It’s everything. (To the soldiers) That’s all.

(The soldiers lift Jehu, and begin to push him out while he struggles and shouts.)

Jehu: You can’t, you mustn’t! No! No!.. You closed your eyes to all the little massacres... you turned a blind eye... you, your honor... you are the Chief Minister. You never tried to stop it... nor did the King in Jezreel... because you need the fear. Unofficially, but you need me!

(The soldiers overcome Jehu and point their swords at him.)

Ziff: Leave us alone, Azgad.

(Azgad resents the order, but leaves. Ziff sits back in his chair, watching Jehu. A pause.)

Ziff: It wasn't a fit of madness, Jehu? No pleasure at the sight of torn flesh? Of disemboweled entrails?

Jehu: No, your honor.

Ziff: Not even a little? A creeping thrill when you feel a life suddenly end, no? Not even just a little bit?

Jehu: I don't think about myself, Sir!

Ziff: We will not gain a year's peace in the hills, Jehu. This massacre, this bloodthirsty, its madness! Twenty minced villagers... it was not my desire. It was your desire!

(A pause. Ziff stands up and moves towards Azgad, sitting on the edge of the marble square. Jehu remains in the same position in the center of the square, still threatened by the soldiers' swords.)

Ziff: What was that show for, Azgad? Why did you drag an officer with a sack on his head in sight of the whole town?

Azgad: Your honor, this man is a murderer.

Ziff: He's the best officer we have in the Gil'ad. The soldiers love him.

Azgad: The man is mad. All the Aramaean villages may yet rebel because of him.

Ziff: They won't rebel because of what he did, but because of what you didn't do. For a whole year you failed to impose quiet in the Aramaean villages.

Azgad: I received my orders from the king.

Ziff: The king lies sick in Jezreel. He refuses to have any knowledge of all of this bloodshed in the hills. Why do you think he is sick, Azgad?

Azgad: You're talking about the king, sir!... and this man is nothing but a thug.

Ziff: So he must be taught manners, not to shout in public and about things that should be left in the dark. We need people like him.

Azgad: What do we need him for? Why do we need people like him at all?

Ziff: We shall see.

Azgad: What shall we see?

(A pause)

Ziff: I want him. I'll teach him.

Azgad: Your honor, I beg you. Don't touch this man.

Ziff: I've heard you.

(Ziff returns to the marble square)

Ziff: Release him.

(The two soldiers untie Jehu's hands. Ziff motions and they walk out.)

Ziff: Up, Jehu. On your feet. Back straight, shoulders wide.

(Jehu straightens himself hesitantly. Ziff pats him to stand straighter, touches his shoulders.)

Ziff: Now let's see you walk.

(Jehu begins to move around the edges of the marble square.)

Ziff: Nobody is going to leap on you. Straighten out...
breath freely.

(Jehu continues his rounds, until Ziff motions him to stop.)

Ziff: Maybe, Jehu, just maybe. But first you'll have to convince the king that you're not a thug, that you are aware of the subtler needs of the occupation of the hill country. I'll bring you to the king if you'll learn to speak properly. I'll teach you the style, the fine proper form one must present things in.

(Ziff approaches Jehu.)

Ziff: I'll bring you to the king if you learn to chat about begonias.

Jehu: Begonias?

Ziff: It's a kind of flower, Jehu. About begonias and the weather... if not, I'll let Azgad proceed with the death sentence.

SCENE THREE

(Semi darkness. Music.)

Jehu walks around the marble square while the two soldiers fuss around him, clean him, hang a cloak around his shoulders. He is memorizing a text on a piece of paper he is holding in his hand. **Ziff**, meanwhile, places a chair on the table. **Ziff** stops **Jehu** at the edge of the square by means of a small stick he holds in his hands.

Full lights come on.

Ziff strides in a ceremonial manner. **Jehu** imitates his gait as he moves into the square. **Ziff** kneels down in front of the chair on the table. **Jehu** follows suit. **Ziff** rises and motions **Jehu** to begin, “correcting” **Jehu**’s gestures as he reads the text.)

Jehu: Flowers, your majesty. Flowers in the fields and the scent of hey, a hard sun and the shadows of mountains. That was the soil whence I grew, and from which I imbibed my love for this country. And this love is being besmirched by the horrible accusation that I massacred those villagers. I am innocent, your majesty. I did not murder those villagers. Soldiers are not murderers. Soldiers carry out orders, and no such order was issued. Those who went on a rampage in the village were not soldiers. Perhaps they were our mercenaries from Sidon. We shall punish them, your majesty. We shall find the guilty. We won’t rest until we find them.

(**Ziff** lays the stick on **Jehu**’s head and takes the sheet of paper away from him.)

Ziff: Now again- from the beginning.

(Darkness)

SCENE FOUR

(The lights come up.

Ziff stands in front of the table. Jehu lies face down in front of him with the stick balanced on his head. He rises to a kneeling position, as if he was facing the king, the stick still balanced on his head.)

Jehu: Those who went on a rampage in the village were not soldiers. Perhaps they were our mercenaries from Sidon. We shall punish them, your majesty. We shall find the guilty. We won't rest until we find them. This is intolerable. Not only did they perpetrate a massacre, but they are trying to cast the blame on a royal officer and on the whole kingdom. I am trying to gain your trust, your majesty, not only in my description of the facts but also in the very way I describe them.

(Ziff removes the stick from Jehu's head and kneels opposite of him. A pause.)

Jehu: You are teaching me to lie, sir. I am not a liar.

Ziff: You must be thinking, doesn't Ziff realize anything? All this about flowers, about the law? It's not me. I'm a thug. Always have been and always will be.

Jehu: You are teaching me to lie, sir.

Ziff: I'm teaching you to live, Jehu.

Jehu: What kind of life is it? Flowers in the fields and the scent of hay- these are your words, not mine.

Ziff: Your head depends on them. It's hard for you. You choke, because you are scared. What are you scared of? Of the words? Of being dependent on words?

A time will come when you'll realize what you are with these words and what you are worth without them. At that moment, the words will become yours, not mine. You will learn how to put a fine form on things, and then... People change, Jehu.

SCENE FIVE

(Keturah enters the marble square flouncing her skirt. Dance music is heard as she enters.)

Keturah: How do you like it, father?

(Ziff kisses Keturah.)

Ziff: Jehu, this is my daughter, Keturah.

(Jehu bows to her. She pulls him by the hand to dance with her. Jehu hesitates at first, fearing Ziff's reaction, but eventually responds and dances with her. They chat as they dance.)

Keturah: Dose he pester you, my dad? Did he already speak to you about the weather and begonias?

Jehu: He mentioned something of the sort, young lady.

Keturah: And what is it you do, Jehu?

Jehu: I'm an officer, madam.

Keturah: So I see.

Jehu: In the hills of Gil'ad.

Keturah: Really? I envy you, Jehu. I hardly ever leave this palace. Just imagine: the sun always rises in this window and sets in that window. And what is it exactly you do there in the hills?

Jehu: My duty, of course, young lady.

Keturah: You sound exactly like father. So dull. Sometimes one can simply go crazy in this place. I've become an expert in killing time.

Jehu: In this respect, madam, you're not much different from my soldiers.
They also kill time, every single day. It's strange

how one kills time throughout one's life in order to shorten the way from the womb to the tomb.

Keturah: This conversation is too heavy for me. It scares me.

Jehu: I apologize, madam. I'm a soldier, madam.

Keturah: Do you like to dance, Jehu?

Jehu: Occasionally...

(They dance until Ziff intervenes.)

Ziff: That's enough!

(Keturah giggles, flounces her skirts and leaves the marble square into the darkness. As she leaves, the music fades out.)

Ziff: Where did you learn to dance like that, Jehu?

(Jehu freezes into immobility.)

Jehu: People change, your honor.

(He bows to Ziff according to etiquette, as he was taught to do. Ziff contains himself for a while, and then bursts out laughing, and Jehu joins his laughter.)

Soldiers: Ain't it nice to remember, your Excellency? It's important to remember, isn't it so? Isn't it?

(They stop laughing. Jehu withdraws beyond the marble square and sits there in his chair.)

As he does so, the soldiers enter the square, and with their entry Ziff reverts to his numb state as in the beginning of the play. The soldiers remove the table and chair from the marble square.)

SCENE SIX

(The soldiers lead Ziff to his chair outside the marble square, all the while chatting to him.)

2nd soldier: You sent us to Jezreel, remember?

(He pulls out a letter.)

2nd soldier: You gave us a dispatch to deliver to king Yehoram
in the matter of one Jehu son of Nimshi. Remember
that name?

1st soldier: Remember?

(They perform a dance step.)

1st soldier: Jehu returned to the hills.

2nd soldier: He developed. He learned.

1st soldier: The fine form.

2nd soldier: And you wanted to make him greater.

1st soldier: So we set out for Jezreel.

(The two soldiers march on the marble square, whistling a marching tune. The lights change, and the soldiers stop. They emit expressions of awe and admiration. They are in the royal palace in Jezreel.)

1st soldiers: The Jezreel palace in the calm of noon.

(They imitate birds' twits and carry the royal throne into the marble square.)

2nd soldier: King Yehoram is dozing. He is sick.

1st soldier: what about queen Zilpah?

2nd soldier: She's watering flower pots.

1st soldiers: Begonias?

2nd soldier: Tsk... tsk... tsk... Chrysanthemums. And Jezebel?

1st soldier: The old one? In the tower. Cursing... You know, we're all alone in the palace. We could do anything we feel like... Hey, you know what? Let's sit on the king's throne... we could learn something from the experience.

2nd soldier: If the old one steps in, then...

(He passes his hand across his throat.)

1st soldier: What're you getting so worked up about? She's up in the tower... Let's give it a go. For the hell of it. Just for fun.

(2nd soldier sits himself on the throne.)

1st soldier: Well? Well?

2nd soldier: Hard to say.

1st soldier: Well, how does it feel.

2nd soldier: I could get used to this.

1st soldier: Ok, so what d'we do now?

(Both of them turn towards Ziff.)

2nd soldier: We clean.

(He kneels and begins to scrape the floor. 1st soldier jumps on his back, scraping his head.)

2nd soldier: Scrubbing, scrubbing, scrubbing. A month has gone by. Scrubbing, scrubbing. Two months have passed. Scrubbing, scrubbing...

1st soldier: What's gotten into you? Five months passed by. And then, on that great day, at five o'clock in the afternoon, an army emerged from the hills over there.

2nd soldier: (corrects him) There!

(1st soldier gets of the back of 2nd soldier and declares loudly and ceremoniously.)

1st soldier: An army emerged from the hills over there!

(Both run towards a ladder on the side, clamber up it, pushing each other off, then begin to wrestle with great violence, to the accompaniment of powerful music.)

Jehu (offstage): Who is with me, who?

(The music stops suddenly. The soldiers run back to the ladder and climb it to better see the events outside.)

Soldiers (alternately): Who's that, who? It's Jehu! Jehu! He's
come back with the army! King Yehoram sets out to
meet him! Jehu's approaching him closer and closer.
Oho! Oho! A spear! Oho! Oho!

(They shrink on the ladder. A cloak falls from the ceiling on the marble square. They jump off the ladder to the floor.)

2nd soldier: One spear and all is turned around.

1st soldier: King Yehoram's body lies on the ground.

2nd soldier: Ravens. Cypress spikes.

1st soldier: Crickets and silence.

(They pick up the dead king's cloak with an exaggerated show of grief.)

2nd soldier: The good, old, beautiful land of Israel.

(They break into a brief folk dance.)

Jehu (*offstage*): who is with me?!

(Another hesitation. The two soldiers return to the ladder, clambering one on top of the other to peep outside.)

Jehu (*offstage*): Hey! You there! The old woman in the tower,
the one who curses! Jezebel! Throw her out! Out the
window!

(The two soldiers shrink on the ladder, as if wishing not to be seen from the outside.)

1st soldier: She'll fall into the moat.

2nd soldier: And the dogs are hungry.

1st soldier: We could just slip away... we could make a quiet exit from this story.

2nd soldier: And who'd employ us?

1st soldier: We ourselves. We'll be on our own.

2nd soldier: We'd be lost.

(They are lost for a moment in thought)

2nd soldier: We've got no choice.

1st soldier: We had one.

2nd soldier: But now it's gone.

Jehu (*offstage*): Hell, what's the matter with you two there! Throw the hag, the king's mother, Jezebel! Out the window!

(The soldiers hesitate for a moment longer, then, with visible relief, they climb the ladder again energetically and disappear into the ceiling.

A terrible scream is heard.

Zilpah stands up from her chair beyond the edge of the square, turns to the wall and covers her face with a black veil.

The two soldiers descend the ladder quickly. The barking dogs are heard from outside.)

SCENE SEVEN

(Jehu strides ceremoniously on-stage with the accompaniment of music. The two soldiers hurry to place the throne exactly in the center of the marble square. Jehu sits down on the throne. The two soldiers, on all four, fawn on him and rub at his feet like dogs. Jehu rises and they begin to dance before him a dance of self-abasement. Jehu raises his hands. The music immediately ceases. As does the soldiers' dance.)

Jehu: Bring in the queen.

(The soldiers move to the edge of the square with the intention of dragging Zilpah in, but they don't dare to touch her. She comes in on her own. The two soldiers hurry back to Jehu.)

1st soldier: We thought... your honor... perhaps... somehow...

2nd soldiers: You know... the queen... maybe we should throw her too... if you please...

Jehu: Haven't I seen you two somewhere before?

1st soldier: We've got that sort of face, sir. People always seem to remember us from somewhere.

2nd soldier: We fit any role.

1st soldier: We work here... used to work here.

(He draws out a rag to exemplify the kind of work they do. The second soldier does the same and both go down again on all fours to continue to polish the floor. From now on Jehu pays no more attention to them, so they go on polishing the floor.)

Jehu: I know you, madam. During military reviews you looked down at me from the balcony. But today we stand on the same floor. You must forgive me, madam, but that's life. One goes up, the other comes down. But the measure of happiness always remains constant.

(Zilpah is very self-controlled, trying to preserve her dignity.)

Zilpah: You're right, soldier. I'm left with nothing. Only my husband's corpse lying out in the vineyard. I only wish to see him for the last time. Only to mourn him and bury him.

Jehu: I'm not a total fool, madam. You're not going to bury him. Your tears in Navoth's vineyard, in the sight of the whole city, would cause riots. No, madam. Yehoram deserves his death.

Zilpah: Even if he did, still he was a good man and a king.

Jehu: (*cutting her short*) The Good King?

Zilpah: The man who knew how to make me laugh, soldier. The man who knew how to caress my back so I could fall asleep.

Jehu: A whole army is rotting away on the Gil'ad heights because of this Good King. This Good King who was a hollow shell, with his pampered weakness. The king who coveted those bare hills, those miserable villages, so that he could giggle with the pleasure of saying "these are mine, mine." But he didn't want to come near them, this Good King! Because there you have the horror, there human beings are paying the price of these childish dreams. They pay? I pay! This is the man you want to mourn? Mourn here, in the palace. It's healthy to have a good cry.

Zilpah: My grief is my own, soldier. It cannot be shared. Not in front of you. Just permit me to bury him, and then I'll leave Jezreel alone, by myself, and never come back.

Jehu: Why? Why, madam? You are a clever woman. Some say you're as clever as old Jezebel... I'm one of your greatest admirers, madam. And why should you leave? You're a queen. Your place is in the palace. That's your home.

Zilpah: My home is in ruins, soldier. Permit me to see my husband for the last time.

(Jehu hesitates for a moment, then he turns to the soldiers polishing the floor.)

Jehu: Go, get the king and his old mother, Jezebel, and have them prepared for a burial.

1st soldier: The one we shoved off the tower?

(Jehu grabs him by the throat and roars in his face.)

Jehu: A queen she was and a royal funeral she'll get! She and the son! Horses! Keening women! Flowers!

(The two soldiers bow and leave.)

Jehu: And people say I have no heart! I hope that you'll know how to appreciate my gesture, madam. You'll be able to cry your fill among the flowers... and not alone. I'll be with you there. Together we'll march in measured step behind the dead king's cortege. Together we'll stand as the rite is performed. Sorrow will be presented in a quiet and dignified manner, as part of continuing life.

Zilpah: Do I have to scream to make you understand, soldier? You're going to give me flowers? Ceremonies? What you're really trying to do is to bury the murder with my help.

Jehu: Why all these twisting and turning, madam?

(For the first time he shows a pronounced interest in her.)

Jehu: I love resistance, madam. You arouse me. I was interested in your intelligence, your status, but I was wrong. Our relationship could become much deeper.

Zilpah: You scoundrel.

Jehu: What can I do. These lips and that bosom have a different story to tell.

Zilpah: Go to the whores.

Jehu: Eh! Why do you drag my desire and your own to the level of the common herd?

Zilpah: My desire? You must be insane!

Jehu: Perhaps you're still mourning for your dead husband. But I promise you, once the dead sinks away into the recesses of memory, your creative imagination will take control of this flesh. I smell you, madam. I already see what you still fear to envisage. Why lie? Between you and me, you are dying to know what's going on within this skull-box of mine. Whether you like it or not, you're already feeling for the connection between my great thrust from the hills and the little movement in my front, this little protuberance here. Do confess, madam, curiosity is killing you.

(Zilpah spits in his face. Jehu starts, then draws his sword, circles her, lifts her skirt from behind and forces her to bend forward, her bare behind sticking out.)

Jehu: I can already smell your floodwaters... You want to flee my rude force, but already you're curious and want to understand it. Here, I'm so close to your orifices, and in your imagination you are already entering with me deep down, visiting the warm, soft regions, and you already wonder what you can discover about yourself with a sword in the arse. In this, by the way, you are no different from the majority of people... you're privileged, for a moment, to stand in the very focus of a whole revolution thanks to your orifices. No. I didn't plan in advance this confrontation between us. Only the gods can stage-mange such a situation. Some people try to adapt themselves to a woman, to society, to reason. Your husband did suffer a bit from this milady, didn't he?... But what is the result? Paralysis! Or the boneless flexibility of the invertebrates. That's why he's dead and I'm alive. I don't adapt myself, madam. I act. You, a wise woman with a raised ass, feel it very well in your soft tissues. You're scared of it but you're dying of curiosity. That's what keeps you in position. You're already adapting yourself to me. The heart is a flexible muscle. When you straighten yourself up, you'll thoroughly feel the change which has shaken you since you bent down... have years gone by?... No. The sun is still in the sky... Straighten yourself up, madam. Quick. Quick! Otherwise you'll lose all of your charms. Up! Up!

(Zilpah straightens herself up. She has indeed changed. Jehu's mood darkens.)

Jehu: I tried otherwise. I wanted otherwise. But people here insist on getting it through their ass...

(The two soldiers come back and enter the marble square, carrying a sack.)

Soldiers(saluting): Sir!

1st soldier: That's all that's left of the old lady. Her hands and the soles of her feet. All the rest are bones.

Jehu: How about the funeral preparations?

1st soldier: Getting along OK.

2nd soldier: On the one hand getting along. On the other hand, there's a shortage of material.

(The two soldiers empty the sack contents on the marble floor. The remnants of old Jezebel. The audience doesn't see the contents, but Jehu looks at them.)

2nd soldier: We searched in the moat. Old shoes, bones, skin, but the flesh- the thing itself- was missing.

1st soldier: The dogs, sir.

(Jehu opens the sack before Zilpah. She turns her head away. She is incapable of looking.)

Jehu: And to such remains you wanted to put your lips, madam? No. You can't even bear to look... and rightly so. This is the specialty of my priests, the Yahweh priests... but you must have heard of the prophecy. Yehoram knew of it too. The dogs will lick the blood, and only the hands and the soles of the feet will be left... They said it was reward and retribution. Reward and retribution. Into this narrow viewpoint they try to push the whole world... What

meanness of spirit... What lack of imagination.
Don't worry, madam. They'll eventually push me
into it too. My turn will come... But never, never
be misled by their rancid declarations about their
love of mankind. In the name of this love they once
used to sacrifice human beings on their altars. Now
they slaughter twenty to thirty sheep instead. All the
excitement is gone, but this is the price of progress...
at this rate, in the end no sheep will be left either.
A prayer book will be enough. But the narrow
viewpoint, madam, will always remain the same...

(Jehu throws the sack towards the soldiers. Beyond the edge of the square Ziff, Azgad and his wife Maachah rise simultaneously from their seats.)

Jehu: Take the sack to Shomron. Tell Ziff, the chief, and
Azgad, the commander of the army, as follows:
I, Jehu, son of Yehoshafat, son of Nimshi, king
of Israel! King Yehoram is dead. His old mother,
Jezebel is dead. You have the chariots, you have the
horses, you have all of Ahab's household. Come out
and fight me!

(He extends his arm in invitation to Zilpah to join him. When she doesn't respond, he pushes her rudely in front of him and they both leave the stage.)

SCENE EIGHT

(Darkness. The two soldiers hurry and bring back Ziff's desk and chair to the marble square. Ziff stands behind his desk, Azgad in front of it. Maachah, standing behind, bears Azgad's armor. The soldiers revert to their kneeling position behind the sack just as they did in front of Jehu, but now they face Ziff and Azgad. The lights come on.)

Azgad: What were you saying?

1st soldier: I, Jehu son of Yehoshafat...

Azgad: Go on!

(The 2nd soldier motions to the paper the first soldier is carrying in his pocket. The 1st soldier pulls it out, mutters the message sotto voce until he reaches the continuation.)

1st soldier: King Yehoram is dead. His mother, Jezebel, is dead. Queen Zilpah is with me. You have the garrison. You have the chariots. You have the horses, you have all of Ahab's household. Come out and fight me.

Azgad: Is that what he said?

1st soldier: Jehu, sir.

Azgad: How did king Yehoram die?

1st soldier: A spear, sir. (*Shows a hole in a cloak.*)

Azgad: And the old woman?

2nd soldier: Here, sir.

1st soldier: Fell from the tower.

(Azgad approaches them. They open the sack to show him its contents.)

2nd soldier: It's the dogs, sir.

Azgad: How did she fall?

1st soldier: We pushed her.

(Azgad grabs both of them by the throat.)

2nd soldier: It wasn't us!

1st soldier: Someone pushed her.

Azgad: *(Pushes them out of the marble square, calling out):* Let the sons of a bitch pass!

(He turns to Ziff.)

Azgad: We'll march against him at sunrise, sir. We'll teach this bastard how one deals with an upstart rebel.

(Pause)

Azgad: I had to marry Ahab's third cousin to gain your trust. What did he gain it with?... You remember how he came to you- with a death sentence hanging over his head! I told you that then, so you can't say you didn't know who and what he was. What did you see in him? You said that there's something different about him... people change, you said. People change! Who changed? If you bashed his head on the floor, he might have changed! But you, sir, if you don't mind the expression, purred perfume on his hands, so that it was impossible any longer to smell that he pisses on them to keep warm...

(He strides to the edge of the marble square where Maachah, holding up his armor, helps him into it, talking as she does so.)

Maachah: I dreamt last night that birds were pecking at the window, pecking all night. In the morning I found the window full of holes. What do you think of it, Azgad?... Big birds...

SCENE NINE

(Maachah is still helping Azgad to tie the laces of his armor.)

Ziff: Is it dark, or is it my imagination?

Azgad: The sun went down, sir.

Ziff: And what's this noise?

Azgad: The officers are already waiting for us in the stables, sir.

Ziff: And how will you hit, Jehu?

Azgad: We'll march all night. We'll attack him at daybreak in Jezreel. We shall wipe out this mental aberration.

Ziff: Mental aberration? Jehu?... He's healthier than all of us, Azgad. Since when is this savage joy an aberration? Everything in him is passion, taken to its most extreme limits. To swallow everything, to try everything. He should be envied...

(Azgad approaches Ziff)

Azgad: I do hope that this is not what you are going to say in your speech to the officers, sir.

Ziff: Listen to their song, Azgad... how sad the melody is.

Azgad: But the words are cheerful, sir! You must come out to them, to the stables. King Yehoram is dead. You, sir, are the chief minister of the kingdom. You are the source of authority. They can go forth only under your name. Without your blessing, we are no different from Jehu.

Ziff: For whose sake are we going to wage war, Azgad, if the king is dead? For some frail descendent of Ahab's? One of the seventy infesting Shomron? For whom, Azgad?

Azgad: For twenty six years I have been serving the kings of Israel and you, sir. I don't ask questions as to why and for whom. I know against whom and against what. There's no time left, Ziff. The officers are waiting downstairs. We've got no time.

Ziff: I don't believe that you'll be able to beat him, Azgad... not against the great army he brought with him down from the Gil'ad.

(Azgad tries to remonstrate, but Ziff cuts him short with a motion of his hand.)

Ziff: More than that- against Jehu one must be Jehu. You are not... I'm sorry, Azgad, but neither am I. I am incapable of turning myself into some sort of a Jehu. I am what I am- a minister, a bookkeeper, a clerk. When the chips are down, just a clerk.

(Azgad kneels down before Ziff who stands behind the desk, takes Ziff's hand and puts it on his head.)

Azgad: Just let me march out against him, Ziff. Just give me your blessing. Give me. Give me. Give me!

(Ziff doesn't react. He pulls his hand away. Azgad rises up.)

Azgad: What is it, Ziff? You're scared, Isn't that it? Scared.

(Ziff makes no response. Azgad turns to go.)

Ziff: Stay, Azgad.

Azgad: My wife is waiting for me.

Ziff: Wait.

Azgad: What for? The chief minister has made his decision, hasn't he?

Ziff: Wait a minute... Just a minute.

Azgad: I want to wash, to clean myself. Water, your honor, water!

(He leaves, Maachah follows him. Keturah rises from her chair and enters the marble square.)

Ziff: Why aren't you in bed, my child?

(He hugs her shoulders, enjoying the feel of her body.)

Keturah: What's going on, father?

(Ziff hesitates whether to share his emotions with her, but is unable to suppress them.)

Ziff: I assumed that I could comprehend him, Jehu, that I could understand him... For thirty years I have been sitting behind my desk, pen in hand, pretending to understand... But what can one understand with a pen and a desk? In strides Jehu, bends over my papers and laughs in my face...

(He sits down exhaustedly in his chair.)

Keturah: What is it, father? Fear?

Ziff: Yes, fear. I am giving into fear... and confusion... my mind is disintegrating... so what? What do we learn from this, Keturah?... Each to himself... No. Don't reject the fear. Don't suppress it. One day you'll grow up and understand perhaps that fear does contain a positive element.

(Keturah withdraws from him.)

Ziff: Keturah!

(He rises and comes up to her, hugging her.)

Ziff: You remember how we lost you on the Hebron road? I don't want to lose you again. You remember how I used to draw pictures for you, and you used to color them between the lines? And how you used to say that you'd marry me?

Keturah: It's too late for all that, father.

(She leaves the marble square.)

The two soldiers enter, stepping gingerly on the edges of the marble area, hanging back, curious, watching the lonely Ziff carefully. He fails to notice them until they address him.)

1st soldier: Tz tz, your Excellency!

2nd soldier: Yoo hoo, we're here.

(Ziff turns to them with great wariness, almost painfully.)

1st soldier: We've come back, your Excellency. From Jehu. The king. We're official royal mercenaries.

2nd soldiers: We always come back.

1st soldier: The king was overjoyed to the point of tears by the decision of the master of Shomron.

2nd soldier: exactly. He asked him to quote him exactly.

1st soldier: But order must be maintained above all...

(He approaches Ziff at his desk and hands him a document.)

1st soldier: If your Excellency accepts the authority of King Jehu, you are hereby requested to cut off the heads of seventy members of the former ruling family and bring them to Jezreel.

2nd soldier: Standard operating procedure. A new broom. In with the new out with the old- heads roll.

1st soldier: It's all in the list, your Excellency. The seventy members of Ahab's family.

2nd soldier: Your Excellency is unwell?

1st soldier: Is it arthritis?

2nd soldier: Or a swelling of the joints.

1st soldier: Epilepsy, possibly?

2nd soldier: Your Excellency seems to have lost his voice.

1st soldier: Better than to lose one's head.

(Both laugh, slapping each other's backs.)

1st soldier: The king didn't demand that your Excellency do the dirty work with your own hands. There are always more than enough takers for this kind of job.

2nd soldier: But a signature is still necessary. Just a signature.

1st soldier: Nothing really. Just a movement of the hand.

(Ziff rouses himself suddenly, straightens up and shouts into the darkness.)

Ziff: The guard! Here, now!

(The two soldiers perk up their ears with a mock fright. They wait a moment.)

1st soldier: They're gone, Excellency.

2nd soldier: The city's already abandoned.

1st soldier: Because you've made your decision already.

2nd soldier: And if you did, the rest is easy, or should be easy.

1st soldier: I think that the chief minister wants us out. His Excellency wishes to be alone.

(They bow with exaggerated politeness and retreat into the dark surrounding the marble square, but they are still discernible.)

1st soldier: Your Excellency should remember, we are only messengers, only soldiers.

2nd soldier: Anonymous soldiers.

1st soldier: The heart is a flexible muscle, your Excellency. It's not me saying this. King Jehu said so.

(A pause. Ziff recovers and approaches them.)

Ziff: And what if you turn a blind eye, soldiers?... I'll get seventy heads. We'll dig them out of the graveyard... nobody will know the difference.

1st soldier: There's a certain broad, Batsheba, always hanging around there in the corner near the stables of the Jezreel palace.

(To second soldier) Know her?

(2nd soldier indicates with his hands a huge pair of teats.)

1st soldier: Even she, your Excellency, would be ashamed of striking such bargains. It would be beneath her.

2nd soldier: It's a mistake to think there's honor behind horses' asses.

1st soldier: More there than in other places. What have you got left there but honor?

Ziff: Take me. My head will weigh more with Jehu than their seventy.

1st soldier: With all due respect, your Excellency, we have no voice in this matter... we're just a conduit, your Excellency, a drainpipe...

Ziff: A sewer!

2nd soldier: Why the abuse, your Excellency? Why? Are we to blame?

(Ziff is paralyzed, standing impotently. The soldiers surround him.)

1st soldier: So we've agreed about the seventy, your Excellency?
Is't a deal?

(Ziff makes no response.)

1st soldier: Do we sign, your Excellency?

(Silence.)

1st soldier: So we're agreed?... signed? Shaken hands on it?

2nd soldier: Sealed with a kiss?

[In the original performance here was an intermission]

SCENE TEN

(The actors enter and sit in the chairs around the marble square. Darkness. The lights come on. Ziff kneels by a brazier, in which he burns documents. Keturah is next to him.)

Keturah: I heard they're looking for people in the streets, father. I heard them checking names against lists. Knocking on doors. Looking for Ahab's family. Even third cousins... I'm scared, father. They could come to us too.

Ziff: We are not members of the family.

Keturah: But we always were in their company. We know them... There could be a mistake.

Ziff: We are not of the family... They won't come to us... They're not looking for us.

Keturah: What is it they want, father?

(Silence.)

Keturah: So this is what they call "growing up", right father? Somebody falls and it's not you. The one who is left, grows up and learns something, right?

(Ziff doesn't react.)

Keturah: Tell me it's only a bad dream, that in the morning we'll wake up and hear the birds, you will draw lines and I'll color between them, we'll draw a sun and it'll smile at us from the corner of the page.

Ziff: It's only Ahab's family... everything has a price...

(Maachah enters the marble square holding a small cushion. She kneels in the middle of the square, the cushion under her knees. Ziff and Keturah stand, watching her.)

Ziff: It's only Ahab's family.
(Ziff and Keturah leave the square.)

SCENE ELEVEN

(The soldiers carry in a small basin on a stool and a ewer of water and place them by Maachah's side. They withdraw to the edges of the marble square, close to where Azgad is standing. 1st soldier is holding a sheet of paper.)

Maachah: I asked you not to let them into the house. They never clean their feet.

1st soldier: It's time, commander Azgad. The woman is in the list.

Azgad: I know you two. On the first night in camp you cried and asked for mamma.

2nd soldier: And played at war with wooden swords.

Azgad: Then you were given human dolls to hit, and you said that's not the real thing. We smeared you with chicken blood and you said it's not real. You stabbed dead horses to get the feel and you said they're not alive. Now you've finally arrived at the real thing, at the truth, at the living flesh, right?

1st soldier: It's no good, your honor. She's in the list.

Azgad: It's true she's a distant cousin of Ahab's, but that's all there is to it.

(1st soldier approaches Azgad.)

1st soldier: Why not think of it positively, as a chance to begin a new life? You'll get yourself a pink young girl, plump and laughing. She'll keep you warm better than this dry onion. What's so bad about that?

Azgad: Give me a little time. I want to prepare her.

(2nd soldier also goes up to Azgad.)

2nd soldier: Don't you want it sharp and short, sir? In matters like these, it's much preferable, believe me. I'm speaking from experience.

(Azgad moves as if he was going to hit them, but the soldiers move back in time.)

1st soldier: We'll wait, sir. We'll wait a bit.

(The two soldiers move out into the darkness surrounding the marble square, and sit down to watch the proceedings.)

Maachah: Are they gone?

Azgad: They're gone.

Maachah: Take off your clothes.

(Azgad takes off his clothes and armor, baring the upper part of his body.)

Maachah: Give them to me.

(Azgad hands her his coat. Maachah sniffs it as she folds it.)

Maachah: This smell... through this smell I travel with you everywhere. Through it I can see any country you've been to, folded inside, with this smell.

(Azgad doesn't react. He sits down at the other side of the small water basin and washes his hands and face.)

Maachah: This time you've been far, further than ever. Isn't it so, my Azgad? You are tired.

(Azgad dips all of his head into the basin.)

Maachah: But there has been no war. The coat is whole, no tears, no holes. The holes are the signs I have.

(Azgad raises his head from the water.)

Azgad: And you always wait for the soldier who's got only one thing on his mind. Lie down, woman. The brute is back home. And they become one flesh again.

Maachah: I've put on the finest dress.

(She crouches with her head low, raising her behind and spreading open her skirt from behind. Azgad turns his head away.)

Azgad: I want us to talk, Maachah. I want you to tell me how your day was... I want to talk. I want you to be you, to be what you are between the waitings, between the flesh on flesh. I know the flesh through and through. There must be something else, something more, there must be, Maachah...

(Maachah reverts to her former sitting position.)

Maachah: I don't understand what you want from me...

Azgad: That you laugh.

Maachah: About what?

(Silence)

Azgad: Never mind.

Maachah: You don't want me tonight?

(Azgad doesn't answer.)

Maachah: I disgust you. I'm not beautiful any more.

Azgad: You are beautiful.

(He takes water from the basin with his hand and washes Maachah's face and neck.)

Maachah: No. I know. You always used to tear my dress, to bury me, to crush me. You didn't leave much of me. Very little of myself you left, Azgad.

Azgad: That's the way you loved it.

Maachah: I love when you leave little of me. That's enough for all the time that you are away. Only waiting for you to come. But now you don't find me beautiful. I'm old.

Azgd: So am I.

(He takes Maachah's hand, immerses it in the basin. He feels for the roots of her hand. He picks up a knife unhurriedly, gently, and passes it inside the water over her wrist, cutting the veins of first one wrist, then of the second. Maachah is very calm. It is as if she hardly realizes what he is doing, but perhaps she understands it very well. She wants to pull her hands out of the basin, but Azgd gently stops her.)

Azgd: Keep them in.

Maachah: It burns.

Azgd: In the water it won't burn.

Maachah: You always know what must be done. It gives me a lot of confidence. I want you to know it, Azgd. This way I never have to think of things... all kinds of things.

(Azgd sits by Maachah exhaustedly, with a drooping head. He watches the basin for a long time motionlessly, then puts his own hands into it, next to Maachah's, and slashes his own wrists with the knife.)

Maachah: You didn't have to, Azgd.

Azgd: No, but he is already everywhere.

(Both sit with their hands in the water, next to each other, leaning on each other. A long silence.)

Maachah: You married me because of my name and connections, isn't that so, Azgd? You wished to climb high...

Azgd: Why talk now, Maachah?

Maachah: You wanted us to talk.

(Azgd doesn't answer.)

Maachah: Don't cry, Azgad. It frightens me.

Azgad: I am not.

Maachah: Remember, you were with Ahab. You told me the story, how you were with him in the end, when he was wounded in battle. An arrow in the belly and the blood flowing into the chariot and you propping him up from behind so that he wouldn't fall, so that nobody could see that the great king is dead. That he was dead already. It was you who held him up. You held him up all day standing in the chariot. Standing dead.

(As Maachah speaks, the blood filled water begins to overflow from the basin and splash onto the marble floor.)

Maachah: And the blood flowed and flowed... and kept on flowing. And the body turned cold. The arms became heavy, heavy as night fell... a living dead king. So that nobody should see.

(For a long time they sit by each other motionlessly, leaning on each other.)

Maachah: I've become dried out, Azgad, I'm withered.

Azgad: You are the most beautiful woman I've ever known.
(Silence.)

Maachah: Thank you. That was nice... that's very nice of you... I'll remember this, Azgad... with the holes. I could always tell by the holes.

(They remain for a long time in this position. The bloody water continues to overflow the edge of the basin. The two soldiers reenter the square and look at the two motionless figures, realizing that they are dead.)

2nd soldier: Can't make it out. She- yes. But why him?

1st soldier: Because of the disgust.

2nd soldier: The disgust?... can't make it out.

(The soldiers lay Azgad's and Maachah's body on the floor, carry the basin and the ewer outside the marble square, wrap up the heads of the dead, raise them on their feet and lead them one by one to their seats outside the marble square. They return with buckets of water and rags to clean up the blood and water left on the marble floor.)

SCENE TWEELEVE

(The two soldiers have finished cleaning the marble square. Ziff appears, rolling into the square cloth-covered barrels. Ziff's mouth and nose are covered with a band of cloth, to ward off the stench rising from the barrels.)

The soldiers move to the back of the square, open two large trapdoors in the floor, wrap cloth bands on their noses also and take position behind the barrels. Ziff, with a blanket on his shoulders, stands off alone, waiting on and on, until he runs out of patience and turns to the 1st soldier.)

Ziff: Any word from the king?

(The soldier shrugs. Ziff turns to the 2nd soldier.)

Ziff: The king should be arriving already, no?

(The 2nd soldier shrugs.)

Ziff: Perhaps I didn't understand, but I was told to wait for the king at the palace entrance, before sunrise...

1st soldier: He'll come.

(Ziff marches to and fro in agitation, careful to avoid stepping on the black dividing lines between the marble slabs on the floor. He tries to establish human contact with the soldiers.)

Ziff: I was a child. It was back luck to step on the dividing lines. Of you did, something terrible would happen.

1st soldier: And now the lines are frightening again.

2nd soldier: That's because of the waiting, the hope.

1st soldier: Only in war you see things like that. You wait and wait, and then- puff! Fate.

Ziff: All night I carried those barrels through back roads.

(The two soldiers express growing sympathy with him.)

1st soldier: Yes, we know the feeling. Not a dog barking.

2nd soldier: Not a leaf moves.

1st soldier: Even the moon stops in the sky, right?

Ziff: But in the dark I protected all the sleeping people. I protected them from seeing what they don't want to know. We've become closer.

1st soldier: I'm so glad. People always say that we're heartless.

2nd soldier: I've got an old mother.

1st soldier: And I a deaf father.

2nd soldier: My mom used to spit in my soup.

1st soldier: A difficult childhood. But you had no black stripes in the marble.

2nd soldier: No. That I didn't have. I must admit.

(The two soldiers look in the direction of the audience.)

2nd soldier: They are beginning to come.

(Ziff looks in the direction of the audience and panics. He pulls on the blanket to hide himself in it. The two soldiers are beginning to untie the cloth covers of the barrels.)

Ziff: Who are all these people?... What's this audience for? Why are they here?

(The soldiers begin to remove the cloth covers from the barrels.)

Ziff: What are you doing? What are you doing?

(Ziff huddles in a panic in the blanket. He tries to hide himself. The soldiers take out the severed heads from the barrels and pile them up in a heap.)

Ziff: People shouldn't see this! The king won't want the sun to shine on these heads! Let them rest in peace!

2nd soldier: In peace, huh!

Ziff: Soldiers!

1st soldier: Rest, huh!

Ziff: Dogs!

(The barrels covers have by now been completely removed.)

Ziff: You assholes! I used to wipe out a thousand like you with a single comma! You think I'm one of you? The chief minister is standing here! Dogs! You'll yet crawl before me!

(He then huddles again inside his blanket, on the floor, trying to hide his head in terror. The soldiers continue to take out the heads from the barrels.)

1st soldier: You see? A moment ago he was a soldier like us, our pal. And now he's stepping on all of his lines again.

(A fanfare is heard, royal music, and in march Jehu and Zilpah in a ceremonial gait. The soldiers salute and hurry to bring a chair for Zilpah. Jehu, in the meantime, is looking towards the audience.)

Jehu: And how fare all our good subjects?

2nd soldier: They're arriving, your majesty. They're crowding the terraces and stairs.

(Jehu turns his thumb down, and the soldiers do likewise.)

Jehu: Good!

(Jehu kneels down by Ziff, raises the blanket and talks to him intimately. His words are inaudible.

Jehu straightens himself up and talks to the soldiers.)

Jehu: Will they hear us outside?

The soldiers: They will, your majesty. The garden will fill up too.

(Jehu takes position behind the barrels, spreads his hands and addresses the audience in a loud, ceremonious voice.)

Jehu: Holy assembly! A terrible thing has taken place in Israel. A horrible crime. I, Jehu, son of Yehoshafat, son of Nimshi, swear herby before you never to rest. We shall find the guilty. We shan't give up.

(He turns to Ziff, and picks up the same small stick which Ziff used to teach him.)

Jehu: Ziff. Up. Stand up. Ziff!

(Ziff doesn't move.)

Jehu: What is it, Ziff? What's this riddle?

(Ziff is still under the blanket, with a covered head.)

Ziff: A riddle, sir?

Jehu: The barrels! The barrels! And their bubbling contents. How come? Why?...

(Jehu turns to 1st soldier)

Jehu: Are we heard outside?

1st soldier: Yes, your majesty.

Jehu: Can you explain this, Ziff?

Ziff: What is there to explain... the king demanded and I carried out his order... I'm only a soldier, sir.

Jehu: Is that it, Ziff?... That's all?

(He turns to the soldiers.)

Jehu: Why is this man covered up? Why can't I see a face! Eyes! Body!

(The two soldiers tear the blanket off Ziff. Zilpah sits on her chair, fanning her face with a fan.)

Jehu: How wonderful. Ziff disappears in his newly acquired anonymity and the king is left with the barrels. Wonderful. So easy. Envious. No regrets? No explanation? Perhaps it's only a bad dream? Count the heads.

(Ziff is silent, cringing, almost lying on the floor. Jehu points to the opening in the marble floor opened before by the soldiers and shouts again.)

Jehu: Count the heads!

(The two soldiers begin to throw the heads from the pile into the floor pit. One soldier arranges them in rows inside the pit.)

1st soldier: Tow, four.

2nd soldier: Six, eight.

Ziff: I'm only an accountant, your majesty...

1st soldier: Ten, twelve.

2nd soldier: Fourteen, sixteen.

Ziff: I'm only a soldier, a loyal servant of the king.

1st soldier: Eighteen, twenty.

2nd soldier: Twenty.

1st soldier: Twenty one.

(Jehu turns to them, motioning them to continue their counting quietly.)

Jehu: Shhh... not out loud.

(Turns to Ziff.)

Jehu: No, Ziff. I don't like this "loyal servant" stuff. The masses of seekers of justice want to know who filled up these barrels. They want to see you, Ziff... But where are you? Where is Ziff? Where did the all-powerful chief minister disappear to? You wanted to pin this murder, this disgusting massacre, on me? On the king? And what were you, an innocent lamb? You didn't see, you didn't hear, you weren't there? You couldn't say- No? Whom are you trying to fool, Ziff? Yourself? The great crowd assembled here? Weren't you the ruler of the Shomron? Didn't you have an army? The chariots? Your very name? And the House of Ahab behind you? Were you just a mere

worm? You were chief minister! Stand up, Ziff. Up!
Up! Straighten your shoulders! Walk around, let's
see you!

(Ziff rises with difficulty and begins to walk around the square, prodded by Jehu's stick. Zilpah continues to fan herself.)

Jehu: But before we are done with you, Ziff, we are going to turn the tables. We'll act in a royal manner. The kingly role privileges one, even obliges one, to investigate. The people also insist on getting the saturated version of the drama: What has happened to the mighty chief minister?

(He throws a quick glance at the soldiers.)

Jehu: Are we heard outside?

Soldiers: Yes, sir.

Jehu: Perhaps, Ziff, you are one of those who are capable of soaring with the birds and looking high above, through the transparent upper air, at the lowly events taking place on the ground? What are a few murdered people when considered from an eagle's height?... But no, no. You are not capable of such soaring. You are not familiar with the art of flying. Or perhaps you are trying to hide behind the unusual self-deprecating excuse of all scoundrels. I? Who am I? "Reasons of State", "State Security". Anybody else would have done the same, so why me? But you are not a fool, Ziff. Only fools measure others by their own measure... Would everyone else commit murder? Would Ahab? Would Yehoram? Would Azgad? Would they have committed murder? Or

perhaps one should look at the human aspect of it. Some of them may have deserved to die. But what about the others? Those who had not sinned? You dipped your nose into a begonia blossom and oops-one was gone. You lay down sick with fear and oops, another one. Oops after oops. Piles of oopses, Ziff. Too many of them.

2nd soldier: Seventy.

Jehu: Seventy! Seventy, Ziff! I killed two, but you! Seventy bleeding heads, all of them your handiwork. All your own. How could you, Ziff? How could you?

(He prods Ziff with his stick to the edge of the open pit containing the heads, forces him to bend over the pit and lays the stick on his head, just as Ziff did to him when training him.)

Jehu: You are not a murderer, not an evil man, not a fool, but in the end you've become all of them, a murderer, an evil man and a fool... You dwelled peacefully in your palace, and suddenly- oops and oops. It's a riddle. I love riddles. For the same of such riddles its worthwhile being a king. And there's all the time in the world for finding a solution... we're in no hurry... because you're going to live, Ziff. (In a low, quiet voice, to Ziff) You've been saved, my friend. I need you alive, in the palace. (Again in a loud voice.) A living memento of the horror. A burning focus of guilt. So that everyone will see, day by day, who committed the murder.

(Again Jehu changes his voice into an intimate tone, laughs, full of self-admiration.)

Jehu: Well, Ziff, how'd you like it? Wasn't it well done?
Eh? Wasn't I great? How did you like my style?
Wasn't it really and truly putting a fine form on
things? We're going to have lots of talks, Ziff... real
conversations, Good you've come.

(He slaps Ziff's behind, then turns abruptly and strides off the marble square into the darkness.)

SCENE THIRTEEN

(As soon as Jehu leaves, the soldiers roll the barrels off the stage and close the trapdoors over the head-filled pit. They then move out of the marble square. Ziff remains in his bent position.)

Zilpah, who had stopped fanning herself, now gets up and moves to Ziff. She is somewhat put off by him.)

Zilpah: Ziff, you stink... did you shit yourself?... Go wash. Nowadays you mustn't even stink without permission...

(She straightens Ziff up, kneels by his side, pulls off the trousers he wears under his robe and throws them away. She then leads him to her own chair and seats him in it. She talks to him, as he stares vacantly in front of him.)

Zilpah: I don't want to be cruel, but I just thought you should know: Keturah is now with him. In his bedroom. When she comes out, you won't recognize her. He will use all her tenderest parts, Ziff. He will investigate, suck and tear every bit of her. If he could have kept her body whole, he would have even pushed his head into her womb. He would have rammed his fist into her behind until it came right out of her mouth. A real prospector... searching for minerals in the muscle tissues, in the twists of the veins. At this moment he undoubtedly is showing her the urine aquarium, which he forced me to fill, questioning whether the soul may be discovered through the contents of the bladder, and perhaps the fish he threw in could live... an enthusiastic naturalist, Ziff, a thoroughly materialistic man... In the beginning

of course she'll try to resist, to preserve something of her old world... but soon enough she'll give in and allow herself to sink, to disappear. His will will be hers... and you'll have to forgive her, Ziff... she won't want to see you when she comes out. She'll avoid you. The old world will hurt her too much... no, no, my good friend, don't get angry. What memory of a father could she retain with the semen clogging up all of her canals... Forgive me, Ziff. I know. Such an honest man, but you are completely confined to the furrow of the average. Without me, your mind could never descend so deep into the mire. By yourself, you could have never prepared yourself to see what you shall see when you meet Keturah... Only a day ago she was your Keturah... but, only a day ago you were the chief minister of the kingdom... and look at you now...

(As she talks, Ziff raises his head and looks at Zilpah as if he doesn't recognize her. He looks around him, not knowing where he is.)

Ziff: ... The sun will smile from the corner of the page.

Zilpah: What?

(Ziff looks at the black lines in the marble.)

Ziff: These scare me... why do they scare me?

Zilpah: What's happened to you, Ziff?

Ziff: The black lines... the lines...

(Obviously, Zilpah doesn't understand what's happened to him.)

Zilpah: Stand up, Ziff, you poor old man. Up.

(She draws him to his feet. Ziff stares vacantly at her. Zilpah senses the strangeness of his stare.)

Zilpah: It's me, Zilpah...

Ziff: **(Points at the chair)** A chair.

Zilpah: Don't you recognize me, Ziff?

Ziff: A chair!

Zilpah: You don't.

Ziff: A chair!

(Zilpah begins to comprehend the situation.)

Zilpah: A chair... a chair...

Ziff: To sit down.

Zilpah: Yes, this is a chair.

(She kneels by him, cleaning his face with her handkerchief.)

SCENE FOURTEEN

(Ziff is still in his chair, still tended by Zilpah.)

The soldiers return to the marble square, carrying a large wooden table and placing it in the middle of the square. They hurry out again and return with chairs, including the royal throne, placing them around the table.

When the preparations end, Zilpah turns to the table. A soldier awaits her behind the chair assigned to her. She opens and takes off her robe and lays it on the back of her chair. At first glance, the upper part of her body seems naked, but it really is covered by a molded body-fitting armor, similar to the armor now worn by the soldiers.

She sits down. Music. In march Jehu and Keturah in a ceremonial gait. They bow to each other. Keturah tries unsuccessfully to suppress a paroxysm of giggling. She continues to giggle even after Jehu places her in her chair. She also now wears armor similar to Zilpah's.

Jehu sits in his chair. At a hint from him, a soldier hurries to lay a tray in front of him. Jehu takes a loaf of bread, pinches off portions and distributes them to Zilpah, to Keturah and to the more distant Ziff.)

Jehu: Ziff, why are you all the way over there... come here.

(Ziff doesn't move.)

Jehu: Are you comfortable over there?

(Ziff makes no response.)

Jehu: I've come a very long way in order to sit here, Ziff... on the chair, at this table...

(He chews the bread alone. Keturah continues to giggle. Zilpah is immobile.)

Jehu: But I always thought that there would be more to it... something different...

(Pause.)

Jehu: We have the whole family here!

(Pause. Keturah giggles. Jehu reacts.)

Jehu: From now on she'll become your lady-in-waiting, Zilpah... She isn't like you at all. I tried to peer into her by all the tried and tested means that you know of already, and whatever I tried, I encountered a giggle... you see her giggling now...

(Indeed, Keturah is suppressing a giggle. It seems that even the two soldiers serving them at the table are suppressing a laugh welling up within them, as if they and Keturah share some secret known to them only.)

Jehu: That's what it means to be young, Zilpah... eh, Keturah? Funny, what? What's so funny?

(He turns his head sharply to look at the soldiers, as if suspecting them to be the source of the merriment.)

Jehu: You know, Zilpah, these two frighten me more than anything else... They of all people. The future.

(He leans back. Silence around the table. Jehu drums his fingers on the table.)

Jehu: The palace of Jezreel, slumbering in noontime quiet...

(The sound of music. Jehu is at a loss. The silence oppresses him.)

Jehu: Doesn't all this remind you, Zilpah, of the changes of the seasons?... I today. Yehoram yesterday. We are a museum of time, No? Huh?

(Zilpah makes no response. Silence.)

Jehu: So what did you do together, Zilpah, you and Yehoram? What does a couple do at noontime in the palace?

(Silence.)

Jehu: Come on!... What? You talked?

Zilpah: We talked.

Jehu: You laughed?

Zilpah: We laughed.

Jehu: You watered plants?

Zilpah: We did...

(Silence.)

Jehu: We'll also water the plants.

(Silence.)

Jehu: We'll, Ziff, come, come... Here we're all together, in a closed circle, intimate. One can relax... talk...

(Silence.)

Jehu: We should talk, talk... about what happened... what we have seen, what we have done, what's going on. Just chatting... small talk... like everyone...

(Silence.)

Jehu: Without beating around the bush... without fear... just plain talk... from the heart...

(Silence.)

Jehu: Speak!!

(Silence.)

Jehu: Ziff! Come sit here at the table!!

(Motions to the soldiers. They take Ziff between them and sit him down in a chair close to Jehu. Ziff appears not to comprehend what is going on around him. Jehu sticks a piece of bread into his mouth, but Ziff doesn't masticate it, and the piece of bread remains sticking out of his mouth.)

Jehu: What's the matter with you?... Are you sick?

Zilpah: He lost his memory, sir.

Jehu: The memory of what?

Zilpah: Of everything, sir.

Jehu: I never heard of such a thing.

(He looks at Ziff attentively.)

Jehu: Is it because of the heads, Ziff?

(Silence.)

Jehu: No. You brought them to me. You were standing on your feet. You talked. No, that wasn't the moment, right?

(Silence.)

Jehu: But perhaps it is because of my pointing an accusing finger at you, Ziff. Not the dead itself, but its presentation to the public. Yes. Yes... But you know yourself, and who but you, the master behind the scenes manipulation, that somebody had to shoulder the guilt. A king cannot chat about your weather over such a pile of corpses... But it was but a show, Ziff, an entertainment. You should have easily seen through it, a great teacher like you. Who taught me this style but you? Who taught me how to put a fine form on things? You must have known that I didn't really mean you. I need you. Who else can I talk to here but you? You are my chief minister, Ziff. First of all the nobles of the kingdom. Has anything changed?

Ziff: This is a table. This isn't a chair. It's a table.

(Jehu is taken aback. Silence. He looks at Zilpah.)

Jehu: So it's just me and you, Zilpah... we'll take walks in the garden, we'll chant... But why all this paint smeared on your face? One can't see who you are!

Zilpah: That's the way you wanted it, sir.

Jehu: I had enough faces like that in the stables! Wipe off this paint!

(Wearily, Zilpah begins to remove her makeup.)

Jehu: For this I climbed all the way here? For such a table I undertook all the long way from the Gil'ad to Jezreel? What for?

(Zilpah's slowness enrages him.)

Jehu: Wipe it off! Let's see what's underneath! Off with it!

(The two soldiers turn to Zilpah, disregarding her attempts to ward them off. They begin to wipe off the makeup from her face by force, using parts of their clothing for the purpose. Jehu turns savagely on Keturah.)

Jehu: Why aren't you taking care of him? Didn't you hear it said? Children should take care of their parents! Honor thy father and thy mother in order that thy days may be prolonged, in order that thy days may be prolonged, Keturah! Your days, Keturah!

(He turns to leave in a fury, followed by the two soldiers. He stops.)

Jehu: You are his daughter, Keturah. You are going to restore his memory. If he lives- he remembers. You've got to persuade him, for if he doesn't become Ziff again, the Ziff whom I can sit for a talk, I don't have any use for him. We'll turn him over to the soldiers and that would be the end of it! The end! Because what's the point in going on doing what we've already done. What's the point if everything is just what it is?

(He strides furiously out into the darkness. Keturah turns to Ziff.)

Ziff: This is a table. A big table. This is a small chair.

Keturah: Remember, father, when I was lost on the road to Hebron? And you and mother thought that your baby was gone forever, that I was dead?

Ziff: Good woman...

Keturah: I'm your Keturah, father, remember?

Zilpah: What are you doing to him...

Keturah: And when I came back, you beat me up and almost killed me again... remember?

Zilpah: Why are you pestering this poor man? What do you want him to come back to?

Ziff: I'm good today.

Keturah: Enough! Even a cow, a stupid cow smiling on her way to be slaughtered, even she, with no memory, with no thought, feels for her calf. She recognizes her future. I am your future, father. Your sequel.

Zilpah: He is not like you, Keturah. He can't live with it. Leave him in peace.

Keturah: Look at him, my lady... is that what you wish for my father? Why don't you wish this oblivion on yourself?... No, you continue on. I too, my lady... I want to continue...

Ziff: A chair!

(Keturah pulls the chair from under him, throws it and breaks it to pieces, just as in the first scene.)

Keturah: And what now? What is this? What do you see? A chair? A table?... No. No. We're going to remember everything, daddy. Kings will come to visit you and everything will be again as it used to be. Daddy,

come with me. We'll remember everything and in the evenings we'll count stars together.

(As she talks, she hugs Ziff, settles on his knees, and he wraps his arms around her.)

Jehu strides back rapidly into the square. The two soldiers follow him. He seems eager. He has a new idea. Zilpah pulls Keturah away from Ziff to the side.)

Jehu: Well? Well? Nothing, eh?... Never mind, Ziff. If you can't be with us, let me wake you up. Let me. Sit down. What do people talk about in the palace, Ziff? What is there here that you don't find in the military camps in the highlands?

(Triumphantly he produces a flowerpot with a begonia in it and stands it on the table.)

Jehu: Begonias and the weather.

(Ziff stares at the flowerpot.)

Ziff: A chair.

Jehu: A chair.

(He sits down in his chair, seats Ziff in the other chair, and raises the flowerpot to his face.)

Jehu: Begonias, Ziff, a kind of flower... flowers... colors, leaves, the stem... the earth, huh? And what else?... You say it, Ziff.

(Ziff is silent.)

Jehu: Flowers... well, come, come.

(Ziff is silent.)

Jehu: Never mind. The weather!... rain, wind, sun, clouds? Clouds... what else?... Puddles... what's in puddles?... What, Ziff?...

(Ziff rises, makes vague movements towards his lower abdomen.)

Jehu: What?... What?... To piss? Pissing? Very good. We're making progress. Go to piss.

(Ziff turns and shuffles slowly off the marble square into the darkness. Jehu is pleased by his partial success and calls after him.)

Jehu: I'll make you yet top of the heap, Ziff!

(Nods his head with satisfaction. The two women are immobile. Jehu calls further into the darkness.)

Jehu: We'll discuss together the events in Shomron and Jezreel. The biographers will of course distort everything shamelessly, as they always do... but we will be seeking the truth, huh? It's a strange fact, isn't it, Ziff, that in order to understand what we have done we must retell the story from the beginning... a painter paints a child in his father's arms and we suddenly discover what parental love is.

(Jehu settles back in his chair, waiting. Keturah, Zilpah and the soldiers are immobile and silent. Jehu becomes impatient.)

Jehu: Hell, how much time dose one need to piss?

(Nobody answers. Jehu waits a little longer.)

Jehu: Ziff! Ziff!

(Silence.)

Jehu: Perhaps he fell into the hole?... Go take a look.

(The two soldiers leave in the direction Ziff left the marble square. Jehu waits sitting. After a brief interlude, the two soldiers return leading between them Ziff with his head bound by a blood-soaked swathe, the indication of death in this show. He has committed suicide. They lay Ziff on the table before Jehu.)

Jehu: You've escaped me, Ziff... you old bastard... you've escaped from yourself and left me behind...

(Keturah approaches her father's corpse. Zilpah pulls her back, almost off the marble square.)

Jehu, after a furious silence, pushes Ziff's body off the table. Jehu seats himself alone on the royal throne. He glances towards the motionless soldiers.)

Jehu: You're all that I am left with...

1st soldier: Fit to play any role, sir.

(One can see the loathing on Jehu's face, nevertheless...)

Jehu: Got any game? Anything?...

(1st soldier produces a backgammon set. He and his mate open it and lay it on the table. Jehu arranges his pieces on his side, and the soldiers arrange theirs on their side. Jehu leans his head on his hand, elbow on the table, as he throws the dice. The soldiers also throw the dice. The soldiers win the throw and begin to play. The dice are thrown again, the pieces are moved. Darkness descends on the marble square. In the darkness all that is heard are the clack of the game-pieces and the rolling of the dice.)

THE END