

COMING SOON

HEROD'S DAUGHTER
THE SAGA OF SALOME

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Herod's Daughter

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If you had only heard the drumming. It was incredible.

The percussion alone made the evening. The beat was steady. The tempo rapid. The rhythm perfect. No other entertainment was needed. That's what made the plan so perfect. Nobody saw it coming. Not even Herod. The roaring drums and crashing timbrels tragically disguised the evil intent.

But that was the plan.

"Mother, I am so nervous."

"Just express your art. Let your body flow. Especially before your father."

Unimaginable-- a mother manipulating her 15-year-old daughter into tempting the child's own father with dance and lust -- just to seek revenge. It is hard to believe such an act possible. Yet it was happening to the beautiful young Salome.

As servants poured wine in celebration, Salome innocently expressed her art with passion, her tender body free-flowing before her king, her stepfather, Herod Antipas, as he entertained leading men from the four corners of his kingdom. It was during the first quarter-hour of her dance when Salome remembered her mother's advice to express her art 'especially before her father' and proudly moved closer to him to showcase her talent.

As the drums pulsed and pounded and the honored guests howled, Herodias began to realize the workings of her evil plot. The Queen of Galilee and Perea had conceived her plan only three days before, following the arrest of her kingdom's greatest threat, a rogue agitator known as the "Voice from the Wilderness."

Herodias truly feared this rebel. She feared his testimony, his beliefs, and above all his prophecy. Like Elijah, this rebel, named Yochaim, had made it his mission to call on all Israelis to repent. "Cleanse your hearts, souls and minds for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," he constantly cried.

In the prophet's eyes, the marriage between Antipas and Herodias was impure. At each encounter, the desert holy man harassed the Galilean king and queen. "You shall not have intercourse with your brother's wife while your brother is still alive" the rebel would proclaim, quoting the third book of the Torah. These actions infuriated Queen Herodias. Herod, however, let this holy man be. He understood Yochaim's popularity and knew it would be political suicide to publicly condemn such a man. Unconcerned, Herodias pressed her king, her husband, to arrest the "Voice from the Wilderness." Yet, Herod continued to defer.

It was not until this baptizer called on the public to turn their loyalty to a "coming Messiah" -- a rival to the House of Herod -- that Herodias was finally able to convince Antipas that it was time for this troublemaker to go. "The moment the Baptist enters the city limits of Salim," Herod instructed his guard, "put him in chains!" Shortly thereafter, Yochaim was captured, chained, and brought to the dungeons of Machaesus.

Immediately following this arrest, Herodias called for Yochaim's head. Antipas, instead, insisted on calm and called for patience. "Soon his flesh will age and rot in the prison," Antipas insisted, believing he was easing his bride's mind. "Without the cloak of martyrdom, he will soon be forgotten."

Unconvinced, Herodias conceived a plan, and this night -- the night of her daughter's first dance -- was the culmination of her work. She arranged this banquet, on the king's birthday, to celebrate the arrest of the Baptist, and invited the land's most respected and loyal scribes, priests and judges. As Salome entertained Herod and his guests, Herodias paced, anxious for her plan to unfold. Finally, Salome's artful dance came to an end.

Immediately, the king's guests, Galilee's most honored and revered, applauded, offering their fortunes for more time alone with the virgin princess.

"She is my delight alone," Antipas boasted. "Mine alone!"

Overwhelmed by their praise, the bashful Salome rushed to her mother's side. Insecure and innocent, she asked, "Do you think my stepfather enjoyed my dance, mother?"

"I could not think of a more perfect gift," Herodias falsely lauded, then sent her daughter out to properly receive her praise.

Salome returned to the forum where she had just performed. Unconscious of the sensual effect of her performance, she stood before her king and his court, nearly naked.

Her body was sweating.

Her skin glistening.

Her young chest heaving, was trying to capture more breath.

"Did you enjoy my dance, my Lord?"

"More than you could ever imagine, my dear Salome."

"It was my pleasure to perform."

As the others lusted for more, Antipas, filled with pride and determination, made Salome an offer no other could match. "I was so pleased with your performance, I will grant you whatever you ask of me, even to half of my kingdom."

Herodias's pacing stopped.

Her plot was unfolding perfectly!

Upon the words of her lord, Salome flew out of the king's chamber, her feet barely touching the floor, and again returned to Herodias' side.

"Mother, you were right," Salome exclaimed breathlessly.

"I'm so proud of you, my daughter."

"I owe you everything. Let us share this gift," Salome gleamed. "What shall I ask for?"

"I only want one thing."

"Anything mother, anything. Just ask!"

"I want the head of the Baptist."

Salome gasped.

How could her mother make such a vile request?

Like the rest in Israel, Salome had heard Yochaim speak. The young girl admired this great prophet, the one who lived in the wilderness and survived only on honey and locust.

Only the Romans acted with such disregard for God's Order, she thought. "Mother, some say he is Elijah, reborn," Salome appealed. "Others pay him tribute by calling Yochaim 'the greatest person ever born...'"

"Silence!" Herodias commanded. "I will hear none of this. Herod Antipas is the greatest ever born. He is your king."

"But Mother," Salome pleaded. "I danced for my father, my king, to gain his pleasure as a daughter, not..."

“Not what?” Herodias coldly inquired. The queen grabbed her daughter by the arm and held her tight. Firmly, she moved Salome in front of a mirror of polished steel. “Look at you. Look at your body. You are no longer a girl, but a woman.”

Salome paused in front of her image.

Her shoulders and stomach were unveiled.

Her breasts were barely covered, her hips and thighs exposed.

For the first time, she realized her beauty. Sadly, she also realized that the prize offered her was not for her dancing talent, but for her allure.

Yes, her mother was right.

She was no longer a girl.

At least, not in the eyes of pleasure-seeking men.

But Salome’s heart was still very much that of a girl.

“You knew exactly what you were doing,” Herodias artfully convinced her daughter.

“So did you!” Salome cried.

From that moment on, Salome no longer looked at herself with her own eyes, but through the eyes of others. She no longer saw her dance as art or a way to express herself, but as a means to tempt and manipulate. “Passion of the heart” had turned her performance into a “passion of the flesh.”

As Salome stood before the mirror, she watched her tears wash away her childhood and innocence.

“You know what you must do,” added Herodias, ignoring her daughter’s pain.

Salome’s heart hardened as she approached Herod Antipas. She knelt before her king and bowed her head. As his courtiers and military officers looked on, Herod gently lifted Salome’s chin and again asked, “Ask of me whatever you wish and I will grant it to you.”

Salome looked deeply into her stepfather’s eyes and discovered his pupils lustful and wide.

“What have you decided?” Herod asked of her.

“I want the head of your prisoner, Yochaim,” she demanded. “The one they call the Prophet ... John the Baptist.”

What happened to Salome after this dreadful evening? Did she lose her way? Was she ever forgiven? How can a young girl overcome such maternal manipulation and family deceit? What kind of life could she lead as an adult? Find out by reading James Henry’s upcoming novel “Herod’s Daughter: The Saga of Salome”.

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