

THE SOUTH AFRICAN STATE THEATRE IN ASSOCIATION WITH ALLAN KOLSKI HORWITZ PRESENTS

# JERICO

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY  
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STARRING : TSHOGO KHUTSOANE | LEBOHANG MOTAUNG | JONATHAN TAYLOR | KELLY EKSTEEN | JOVAN MUTHRAY

**MOMENTUM THEATRE**



**2 - 19 MARCH 2016**

# JERICO

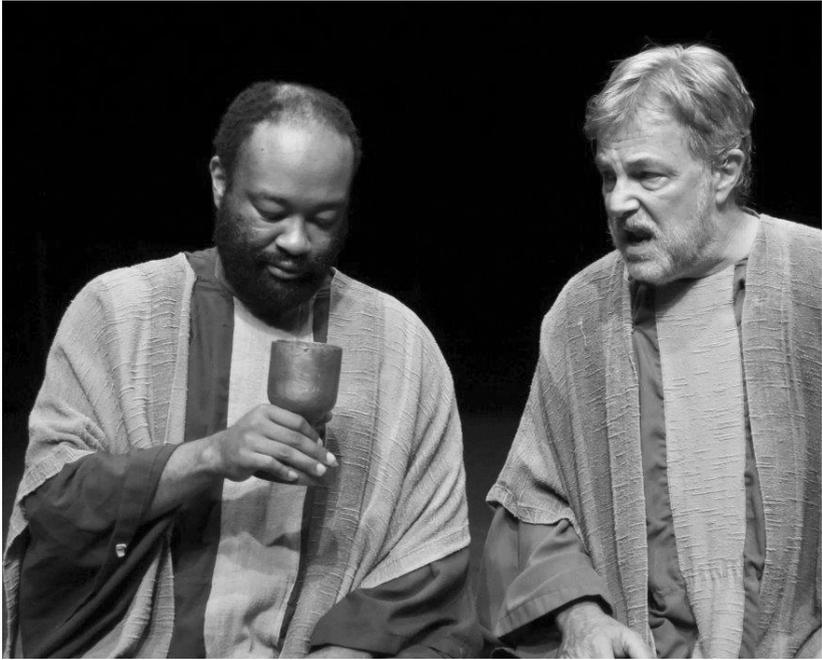
Allan Kolski Horwitz

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SPY 1 and SPY 2



VIZIER, the KING and QUEEN of Jerico



SPY 1, the WHORE and A CANAANITE SOLDIER



The WHORE, SPY 1 and SPY 2

## Program notes

The mythic story of the conquest of Jerico, a wealthy trading city in the Land of Canaan, by the Israelites, as related in the Hebrew Bible's 'Book of Joshua', is the foundation for this play.

Moses, the spiritual giant has died; Joshua, the warrior, has replaced him. The Israelites, a group of twelve tribes who had escaped slavery in Pharaoh's Egypt, have spent forty years traversing the Sinai desert in search of a home. During this time they have suffered all the privations of a hostile terrain including attacks by other nomads, notably the tribe of Amalek. However, they have succeeded in consolidating their new religion and armed with a growing sense of confidence are ready to attempt the invasion of Canaan, the land of 'Milk and Honey', that their God has promised to them if they obey His laws.

The play opens with Joshua's selection, prior to the invasion, of two spies entrusted with scouting out Jerico. We witness their farewells from their families and are given insight into their personalities and past histories. We see them test each other as they carry out their mission; and this contestation of views and personalities continues even as they find shelter with a local whore. At this point the play diverges from the biblical story and shifts to the people of Jerico, and in so doing, explores their responses to the threat of conquest and occupation.

Apart from the Whore, we meet the King and Queen of Jerico and their vizier, and are exposed to their fears and attempts to deal with the looming danger. And so, as the action unfolds, we are presented with varying possibilities: Can the Israelite need for land be accommodated through negotiation and compromise? Can the spies play a role in achieving this outcome? Can the Queen's desire to forestall male aggressiveness trump the king's vacillation and ultimate return to the predictable tactics of deceit and counter violence?

Finally, we confront the historical lesson that those 'who live by the sword, die by the sword'; for when negotiation is abandoned and gives way to war, the inevitable crimes committed by the warring parties return to haunt coming generations. Many tribes and nations have suffered at the hands of those with greater military power. However, should the means they themselves use to defy and survive this suffering not be subjected to moral scrutiny? And as a corollary, should the collective need supersede individual fulfillment and well-being?

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the global debate about how to find a just solution to competing rights, shows that as a species we are still unable to rationally deal with struggles over land and security; instead of employing intelligence and compassion, we easily fall back on fanaticism and violence.

Ultimately Jerico is a work that examines moral options as well as providing the dramatic elements of a 'thriller'. Do these strands come together in a satisfying way? Does one overshadow the other? Written in a style that is cognizant of the sonorous tones of the King James Bible, it hopefully does not become ponderous. But, more

than anything, I hope that the tragic nature of the conflict grips the audience and provides more than a little 'food for thought'.

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The first performance of JERICO took place at The State Theatre, Pretoria on 2 March 2016 with the following cast:

SPY 1/THE VIZIER	Lebohang Motaung
SPY 1'S WIFE/QUEEN OF JERICO/ MARKET WOMAN	Tshego Khutsoane
SPY 2/KING OF JERICO	Jonathan Taylor
SPY 2'S DAUGHTER/THE WHORE	Kelly Eksteen
SHEPHERD/ CANAANITE SOLDIER/ISRAELITE LEADER	Jovan Muthray

## CHARACTERS

Spy 1

His Wife

Spy 2

His Daughter

A Shepherd

A Market Women

The Whore

The King of Jerico

The Queen of Jerico

Their Vizier

A Canaanite Soldier

The Israelite Leader

An Israelite Soldier

## SETTING

ISRAELITE encampment:- two locations: down stage on either side, small areas on which are spread mats; two stools are placed on Spy 1's side, one on Spy 2's.

WHORE's establishment: low table with three stools; two beds are placed on either side of the stage.

The palace of the KING and QUEEN of Jerico: two thrones.

# ACT 1

*SPY 1 and his WIFE are on one side down stage; SPY 2 and his DAUGHTER are down stage opposite them. These areas are demarcated by circles of sand. SPY 1's WIFE busies herself clearing vessels on the low table; moves about ordering things. Across from her, SPY 2 is lying down, dozing, on a mat. The light on this side is very low. As the action moves from scene to scene, the light fades and rises accordingly.*

VOICE: "Now after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord Spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying: Moses, my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all the children of Israel, to the land which I do give to you. As I told Moses, every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon will be yours. From the wilderness to the mountains of Lebanon, and then to the great river, Euphrates, all the land of the Hitites stretching to the great sea where the sun goes down, these will be your boundaries. And there shall not be any man who will be able to stand against you for in the same way that I stood beside Moses, so will I stand with you, and defend and protect you. Be strong and of good courage, and divide up this land between the people. As I have sworn to you, so do."

## Scene 1

*SPY 1 staggers in.*

WIFE: Where were you?

SPY 1: Where do you think?

WIFE: Answer me!

SPY 1: I have.

WIFE: Where were you?

SPY 1: For once I was doing something *important*.

WIFE: And who was she *this time*?

SPY 1: My good wife, you're flogging a dead camel when in front of you is a man with a . . . what shall I say . . .

WIFE: Yes, definitely a *mission*. And one that has led to your getting drunk and hung over and . . .

SPY 1: [*Sarcastically.*] No, no, not this time. [*Slight pause.*] This time . . . agh . . . your head is always filled with . . .

WIFE: Examples of your treachery.

SPY 1: Stop it now! [*Slight pause.*] I was at a council with the Elders and the generals. It's been too long, this wandering.

WIFE: Yes, it has but . . .

SPY 1: Everything is prepared. And they're giving me another chance.

WIFE: To do what?

SPY 1: A task only the bravest can carry out.

WIFE: Yes, the bravest! But we had an agreement!

SPY 1: [*Raises his arms. Sits at the low table.*] Look, I need to eat. I'm tired and I have to leave in the morning.

WIFE: But you swore you wouldn't serve again!

SPY 1: They need me. [*Slight pause.*] Yes, they need *me*. Do you understand?

WIFE: But you swore!

SPY 1: I did but things have changed.

WIFE: Where are you going?

SPY 1: Jerico. [*Slight pause.*] I'm going to Jerico. There is information I must gather before we attack.

WIFE: You're going as a *spy*?

SPY 1: What else does one do before a battle? And in exchange, and you won't believe this, they're offering me . . .

WIFE: A chance to sell your soul.

SPY 1: You really think you know everything! [*Slight pause.*] The Leader is ready. I've never seen such unity.

WIFE: But how can you work for these people after what we've been through?

SPY 1: Don't be so pious! They say only those who prove themselves . . . will benefit. If I do not *oblige*, where will that leave our family? [*Slight pause.*] I'm talking about the division of land.

*Both freeze. Fade to half-light.*

## Scene 2

SPY 2's daughter enters.

DAUGHTER: Greetings, father. You look tired. What did you do today? [*Sits at the low table.*]

SPY 2: I spent some of the morning taking ticks off the sheep then I took a walk.

DAUGHTER: Oh, where did you go?

SPY 2: Just a walk . . .

DAUGHTER: Over the ridge . . . to the widow?

SPY 2: Child, you know full well that since your mother's death I have . . . .

DAUGHTER: Forgive me, father! I know how you mourn, but more and more I wish for you to have companionship.

SPY 2: But I do! I have . . . the Lord! [*Irritatedly.*] Just look at you! Cover yourself, you're half naked! [*DAUGHTER covers herself. Slight pause.*] I went to the mountain.

DAUGHTER: You climbed to the top?

SPY 2: Yes.

DAUGHTER: That's quite a walk!

SPY 2: [*Quietly.*] I was steadying myself. Becoming ready. I was putting aside all . . . all . . .

DAUGHTER: Father, what *are* you talking about? [*Standing up.*] Are you well?

SPY 2: [*Sitting up.*] Child, I have chosen . . . and been chosen. And now I must show that I am worthy.

DAUGHTER: Of the widow?

SPY 2: Oh, stop your prattle!

DAUGHTER: Why? You're worthy of anyone. [*Running to his bed.*] You're the worthiest, wisest man I know.

SPY 2: [*He goes into a dream-like state.*] This is a sacred hour. At last we are ready to make good the Promise. And how rich a land it is, a land of milk and honey! The old scouts said we had not the strength to conquer it. They had no faith. And so we wandered on at the mercy of marauders and bandits. [*Pause. Almost absent mindedly.*] We must determine their strength. They must feel our wrath.

DAUGHTER: I don't understand.

SPY 2: You will. I must play my part in God's plan for our people. I dare not fail.

*Both freeze. Fade to half-light.*

### Scene 3

*As the stage light comes up, they begin talking.*

WIFE: The division of land?

SPY 1: Yes, after the war. Among the tribes.

WIFE: This is madness! How can we be *dividing* up what isn't ours? [*Brings two bowls of food.*]

SPY 1: [*Begins eating.*] There's already manouvering. But I'll prove myself, and we'll get our fair share. I'll make sure we do. [*Slight pause. Embraces her.*] Please, don't be stubborn. There is no other way for us.

WIFE: Nonsense.

SPY 1: [*Slight pause.*] My darling, you know I don't wish for war any more than you do but the people are growing impatient. [*He holds out his bowl to her. She ignores it*] Besides, I promise there'll be no cruelty, no looting. We will fight with discipline and honour.

WIFE: You will? [*Slight pause*] And they? How will *they* fight to protect what is theirs? What if this war runs on without *victory* for us?

SPY 1: No, it will be quick and decisive. We are battle-hardened. Except for you, the doubters among us are dead. [*Raising his bowl.*] More.

WIFE: [*Witheringly.*] Help yourself.

SPY 1: [*Laughs.*] Just because you're a better cook doesn't mean I have to become my own servant.

WIFE: [*Suddenly rising.*] Don't go! I can't accept this is the best way to survive.

SPY 1: As the priests say, we will make the Land ours according to God's law.

WIFE: God's law! [*Slight pause.*] Who once said, "The Old Man has disappeared up the mountain, good riddance to his Jehovah, let us return to the gods of the Nile, they served us well enough"?

SPY 1: This is unfair!

WIFE: And then pulled me into the sweaty horde he'd worked up, and once he was well and truly drunk, grabbed my earrings and added them to the fire and while they were melting, jumped up in front of the altar and swore allegiance to the Great Bull and his Golden Calf.

SPY 1: Hypocrite! You were right there at my side.

WIFE: My good husband, you were the chief of the *sinners*.

*Both freeze. Fade to half-light.*

## Scene 4

DAUGHTER: Father, rest easy, you have failed neither God nor Man nor ever will.

SPY 2: I pray that is true and that it will always be so. [*He stands, helps himself to water from a jug.*] My child, tomorrow I leave for Jerico. [*Begins to pace about.*]

DAUGHTER: Jerico? Oh, no, father! There are giants there!

SPY 2: Even giants will succumb to those who serve Israel.

DAUGHTER: Are you going alone? Surely not!

SPY 2: I will have a companion, a warrior. You will have seen him. His forehead is scarred.

DAUGHTER: [*Alarmed.*] His forehead?

SPY 2: Yes, scarred. [*Slight pause.*] His family, I believe, have set their camp near us several times. They have a large flock and many children – mostly boys, almost grown. [*Laughing*] His wife is well known as a gossip, a complainer.

DAUGHTER: [*Apprehensively.*] Yes, I have seen them . . . I think. [*She rises from his bed; walks a little away.*] I think I know . . . him. I mean, them.

SPY 2: He is known to be a brave man but also to be changeable.

DAUGHTER: [*Quietly.*] We all change whether we're ready or not.

SPY 2: But I will steady him.

DAUGHTER: Yes, steady him as you do all of us. [*Runs back to him; puts her arm round him.*] This is so unexpected. . . . and so dangerous. [*Slight pause.*] Forgive me father but I must speak to you of another matter . . . something very important.

SPY 2: [*Breaking out of his reverie.*] Important! What can be more important than that of which we are speaking?

DAUGHTER: Of course you're doing God's work but this is important to me and will be for you.

SPY 2: Don't blaspheme, child.

DAUGHTER: How long will you be gone?

SPY 2: I do not know.

DAUGHTER: Father, I . . . I . . .

SPY 2: Yes, yes . . . get on with it!

DAUGHTER: I must tell you . . . I am . . . pregnant.

SPY 2: You are . . . ?

DAUGHTER: Yes. [*Slight pause.*] Pregnant.

*Both freeze. Fade to half-light.*

## Scene 5

SPY 1: Alright, it was a damn sin. But we were spared thanks to my record.

WIFE: Yes, your *record*. But how many weren't? Three thousand were lost to the sword by way of *cleansing*. Three thousand of our own people! That's what your precious priests and generals are capable of.

SPY 1: I'm just looking after our interests. Dammit, our family!

WIFE: By sneaking back into that very exclusive club, those who drink with the *Leader*. Don't deny it!

SPY 1: They're my brothers. It was painful to be excluded for so long.

WIFE: I'm sure it was.

SPY 1: And right now we have to be careful and not be seen to step out of line.

WIFE: [*Sarcastically.*] No, let us not offend. After all, the *Leader* is a strong man and a wise one – a model of reason.

SPY 1: Careful! Lower your voice. Do you want someone to hear you?

WIFE: Why should I be scared? How can a feeble-minded woman be responsible for her thoughts, never mind her *utterances*. [*Pause. Holding him.*] Why can't we all just settle where there's unclaimed water and pasture and build a city? We have the skills. How many cities did we build in Egypt?

SPY 1: Oh, yes, we did build their cities. Who can forget the old stories of slavery?

WIFE: Of course we suffered but this is another time. There's a big difference between defence and attack.

SPY 1: Oh, you've noticed! And sometimes that's the difference between dying and staying alive. [*Slight pause.*] You afraid?

WIFE: Don't make me curse the day I married you.

SPY 1: Then let me say again – we have our sons to think of. Like everyone else, we will plant a stake. [*In a very strong and authoritative voice.*] Now pack me a skin with food for three days and a change of robes. I leave at first light. [*Exits.*]

*Both freeze. Fade to half-light.*

## Scene 6

SPY 2: [*Shouting.*] How can this be? Did I not warn you to remain pure till your wedding night? How could the two of you have not waited?

DAUGHTER: Father, do not think me disrespectful but it is not uncommon.

SPY 2: Uncommon? This is so common. You are with child and he has not even . . .

DAUGHTER: He will pay the dowry! He will pay every last goat.

SPY 2: What will people think of me? My own daughter a whore!

DAUGHTER: No, father, he is a God-fearing man like you. He loves me.

SPY 2: *Love!* [*Slight pause.*] How long have you known? Are you not imagining things?

DAUGHTER: I have missed several months. . . . I can feel the swelling very strongly now. I can feel a heartbeat and at times a turning. [*Slight pause*] Truly, father, others my age are married already and have two or even three children.

SPY 2: Yes, I suppose so. You are a . . . a woman now. [*Laughs.*] And he is not a bad young man though he could have been more, how shall I say, *patient* and observant of the law. [*Slight pause.*] Very well, we will seal this with honour. I shall meet with his father.

DAUGHTER: Oh, bless you!

SPY 2: After all we've been through, new life should be welcomed. Our family must grow again. [*Embraces her.*] The days ahead will test me.

DAUGHTER: They shall test all of us.

SPY 2: That . . . [*points to her belly.*] . . . will be the first matter I deal with when I return.

DAUGHTER: Only then? But what if . . . in Jerico something . . . happens to you?

SPY 2: [*Smiles.*] He who does God's work is protected.

DAUGHTER: [*Puts her arms around him.*] Oh, be careful! I love you so much! I know the Lord will be by your side at all times but . . . please go now, please, father, go to his family, tell them you still accept him as my husband, that you have forgiven us.

SPY 2: If only your mother was alive.

DAUGHTER: [*Crying.*] Please, father!

SPY 2: Oh, alright. You have always known how to *get your way.* [*Slight pause.*] I will speak to them tonight.

DAUGHTER: I feel such joy! Return to take pride in me and my child.

SPY 2: Blessings upon you, my daughter. I will pray for you both. And *you* pray that I return with the information we need to win the war.

DAUGHTER: May Canaan soon be ours! [*Kissing him on the forehead.*]

SPY 2: Amen! Now come a little way with me. We have a stray sheep with the neighbour. Let us secure it before we forget to bring it home. [*Both exit.*]

*Blackout.*

## ACT 2

### Scene 1

*Sounds of activity, hustle and bustle of a market. A Shepherd enters, staggering; engages two women, one is selling vegetables, the other is the Whore.*

SHEPHERD: Good people, I have just come from the southern hills. My flocks were grazing there by Shittim when I saw a vast congregation spread out across the plain on the west side of the river, their tents as many as the bricks making up our city walls.

MARKET WOMAN: If that be true, not since the Assyrian army marched by us on its way to Babylon has such a host come near our city.

SHEPHERD: And when some of my goats strayed near them, they cursed me and brandished spears. One of their number, who still spoke the language of Egypt, insisted I was a thief even though they did not find any of their stock mixed with mine. He said theft of their herds would provoke war. Then I was taken to their leader and questioned for they also believed me to be a spy.

MARKET WOMAN: You a spy! For what reason?

WHORE: Ridiculous – you are as innocent as us!

SHEPHERD: Exactly what I told them!

WHORE: And were you believed?

SHEPHERD: No, they beat me. [*Pulls off his tunic.*] See here! See the marks of their lashes.

MARKET WOMAN: Poor man! What barbarians!

SHEPHERD: When they poured boiling water over my hand and I pulled back in pain, they said, so too will Jerico surrender.

WHORE: May the holy Mother of Earth keep us safe!

MARKET WOMAN: [*To the SHEPHERD.*] And then?

SHEPHERD: They made me swear to stay far from their tents and from their flocks – and from their war machines.

MARKET WOMAN: And what is this people's name?

SHEPHERD: Did I not say? Why, it is Israel. They are twelve tribes and their god is One. They say his powers will destroy all who stand against their claiming Canaan. It was outrageous how easily they defeated the Amorite kings on the Moab side.

WHORE: They want all of Canaan? Surely not?

SHEPHERD: There is no glimmer of mercy in their eyes.

MARKET WOMAN: Does the king know of this?

WHORE: Why are there no soldiers here in numbers?

SHEPHERD: That, too, is my worry. I will take my news to the palace. I must reach there before these Israelites march. [*Exits.*]

MARKET WOMAN: This swarm of locusts will devour us! Come sister, let us alert our families

WHORE: And sacrifice to the gods for protection! [*Both exit.*]

*Blackout.*

## Scene 2

*The two spies enter. Both suddenly stop and look out as if towards an horizon.*

SPY 2: Such green! What flocks of fat sheep!

SPY 1: And see those fields and waterways.

SPY 2: Yes, a feast for the eyes after the yellow desert sands.

SPY 1: And see those city walls! What height and breadth! Imagine the treasures they protect?

SPY 2: Indeed, they are immense but praise the Lord, they will soon fall and the king of Jerico, and then after him the kings of all their cities, will hang from their choicest fruit trees and their palaces and temples will burn to the ground.

SPY 1: Burn?

SPY 2: We will spare nothing! That is our covenant with the Lord.

SPY 1: But brother, Jerico is a well-watered jewel! Surely we will divide up the cattle and the women and the gold and not destroy them?

SPY 2: We must entirely cleanse the pestilence and all around they must hear of its fate.

SPY 1: Of course, we must purge wrong-doing, but why wipe out those things that have value? They will fill our lives with ease and plenty.

SPY 2: And so tempt us to stray!

SPY 1: Perhaps some but not those who . . .

SPY 2: Brother, set aside your 'buts'! Let us be on our way. Did our Leader not command us to arrive at sunset? The sentries are tired then and think only of getting away to their homes.

SPY 1: A wise strategy but there is still time enough to savour the sight of this Promised Land.

SPY 2: [*Slight pause.*] You aren't growing faint-hearted, are you?

SPY 1: Me, faint? No one is more equipt for our task than I. The information I gather will guarantee our victory.

SPY 2: [*Slapping Spy 1 on the back.*] I was just checking!

SPY 1: What were you *checking*?

SPY 2: Just checking.

SPY 1: [*Eyeballing him.*] You think I want to go against orders and endanger us?

SPY 2: Of course, not!

SPY 1: I am committed as you are to serve our people.

SPY 2: As it should be! [*They sit, drink water, start eating.*] You know, they say you are a brave man, invincible in all our wars. But many were surprised when you were chosen for this task.

SPY 1: That cannot be.

SPY 2: Come now, don't play innocent.

SPY 1: I'm not playing at anything. You just said I am known to be a brave man.

SPY 2: I did but there is quite a long list of your . . . indiscretions.

SPY 1: I am no better and no worse than any warrior.

SPY 2: And were you not among the first to desert the Lord at Sinai and worship Baal?

SPY 1: Lies! All lies! No one could swear that I was part of that madness. My chief accusers, if you recall, had all been drunk.

SPY 2: Yes, most *were* drunk.

SPY 1: How that orgy pains me! A sin, a grievous sin. [*Slight pause.*] And now you tell me, brother, when Amalek attacked, what part did you play in our defence?

SPY 2: Why, my role is to guard our spirit. I ran from side to side encouraging all to bear misfortune with calm and keep up faith . . . [*Grows very troubled.*] It is many years now but my memory of that battle is still too sore, too pained with slaughter.

SPY 1: I must have killed twenty of the dogs.

SPY 2: No, worse than dogs! We just out of Egypt and they set their ambush, murdering, driving off our flocks and herds. [*Covers his face. Tries to compose himself.*] They seized my wife. I found her body . . . in a ravine, torn apart, they had interfered with her . . . used her . . . and my two young sons, they took them. I could not count the wounds.

SPY 1: Forgive me, I had no idea.

SPY 2: I live their loss daily.

SPY 1: [*Puts his arm round SPY 2.*] A lesser god would have allowed us all to die.

SPY 2: [*Abruptly straightening up.*] A lesser *God*? No. Even in times of calamity we must accept His wisdom. We had surely sinned and so His wrath came to purge us. But now with Him in our midst, no force can stand against us. [*Scrambling to his feet, pointing forward.*] And there it lies! Come, let us take what is promised! [*Pulls SPY 1 to his feet.*] Much will depend on our firm alliance.

SPY 1: Rest easy, I am your man.

SPY 2: And I am yours.

SPY 1: Let us keep cool heads and be of good courage.

SPY 2: Amen. Jerico's great walls will not keep out Israel. [*They exit.*]

*Blackout.*

### Scene 3

*The WHORE'S house. She is tidying up the table. SPY 1 and 2 enter to one side.*

SPY 1: Greetings! Greetings to you, madam! We come to bless and be blessed!

SPY 2: Blessings! Brother, that is no way to address a whore. Besides, I like not the look of this . . . establishment.

SPY 1: Why not? They swore she is hospitable and discreet. [*Calls out again.*] Greetings to you, madam!

WHORE: Coming! Coming!

*She walks towards the entrance. When she reaches it, she stops and listens to their conversation.*

SPY 2: No, really, let us leave. This place is a corruption!

SPY 1: But soldiers and merchants come to drink here. We'll soon find out what they know and think of us and how they're preparing their defences.

SPY 2: Perhaps . . .

SPY 1: Trust me, brother. We will have good reason to bless her. [*Banging again on the door. Calls out.*] Come, madam! Open for us, we bring peace and gold to pay for our lodging!

WHORE: Patience, sir! I will be with you in just a moment.

SPY 1: [*Whispers to SPY 2.*] See how eager she is! Let me go forward. I know the type.

WHORE: [*Opening the door.*] Greetings, sir. I have never yet disappointed.

SPY 1: And from your appearance one can see why travellers flock to lay their heads upon your warm bosom.

WHORE: [*Smiling.*] It gives a poor woman joy to provide comfort.

SPY 1: [*Bowing. Kisses her hand.*] Ah, a smooth and lively hand that can soap away the sweat of travel.

SPY 2: [*In a loud whisper.*] Leave off, brother, enough of this levity! [*To the WHORE.*] Madam, let us find ourselves a quiet corner in this house of . . .

WHORE: Refuge? Rest assured, gentlemen, my hospitality has disappointed no one. Come, sit and savour our wines. All celebrate their excellence. [*Leads them in.*]

SPY 1: Yes, not a moment to soon. My thirst is great. [*The spies sit.*]

WHORE: [*While pouring for them.*] We are an open city, a meeting place for many nations. [*They raise their drinking bowls.*] A toast of welcome to our visitors!

SPY 1: [*Bombastically.*] Indeed. [*Shushing SPY 2 as he follows.*] What a privilege to be here! How fortunate that we may share your lives – if only for a few days while we settle our affairs.

WHORE: The goddess has long smiled upon us. Her sweet waters sustain us though all about is drought. But tell me from where you come and what brings you to Jerico?

SPY 1: Now that is a story but one only to be told on a full stomach.

WHORE: Ah, forgive my inattention! I will fetch you a choice leg and other rare parts.

SPY 2: And bring some fruit. Your grapes are well renowned and, of course, your dates.

SPY 1: And pomegranates red as your lips . . . or is this not the season?

WHORE: Good sir, they are always in season. [*She bows and exits.*]

SPY 2: Brother, it does not become us to joke in such a vulgar manner.

SPY 1: Why? This will set her at ease. She will not suspect a thing.

SPY 2: How loud she is – not like our modest women.

SPY 1: Come now! Loud but not loud enough to deafen. As for her bearing, why she carries herself with wholesome pride.

SPY 2: Wholesome? It is the vanity of false gods and luxury. [*Watches as SPY 1 downs another mug.*] Steady, brother!

SPY 1: Why? Let her imagine me a drunkard – will make it easy to interrogate her without giving offence.

SPY 2: I like not this tactic.

WHORE: [*Enters bringing food. Pours more wine.*] To your good health, gentlemen!

SPY1: [*Spy 1 raises his mug.*] To our stay! [*Drinks it all in one gulp.*] To a future bright as your eyes! [*Pours another and does the same.*]

WHORE: You must have journeyed long today.

SPY1: Indeed, we have. And now need to . . . unwind all our wired limbs.

SPY 2: [*To the WHORE.*] Madam, kindly remove the jug. My brother is becoming uncouth.

WHORE: No, let him drink. [*Laughs.*] That is, after all, the way I make my living. But we will put him to bed if his tongue offends. [*Offers SPY 2 a mug.*] And you, sir? Will you not quench your thirst?

SPY 2: Well, it does look . . . alright but no more than one. [*Drinks.*] We have been three days on the road and my throat is thick with dust.

WHORE: You came past Shittim?

SPY 2: Why do you ask?

WHORE: Only today in the market place I heard a shepherd report he saw a great congregation there, tens of thousands a little beyond the river.

SPY 2: Who are they?

WHORE: Israelites. They were once slaves in Egypt who, it is said, escaped through the power of their god whom no man can touch nor see.

SPY 1: I heard that too.

WHORE: And soon they will march on us.