

I am a daughter of the Hebrews, but I am fleeing from them [Book of Judith 10:12]

Tatiana Dubin, 2018.5

David Rome Prize for Best Lyric Essay, 2018

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At 11 I dressed as Helen of Troy for Halloween and didn't even have a costume just went around telling people wasn't it obvious I was the most beautiful girl in the world and oh how great aunt Beth sneered. It was only after I could maintain proper dinner-party conversation and not *sit there dumbly like your mother used to do* that Beth began to give me the time of day. I learned to sing for my supper because how else was I to build a life and what is life but social life and I am so painfully shy that *how in the world is this child going to survive once I'm gone*, so I become a dilated pupil sucking up the world because I'll stutter my way home unless I can entertain.

I sputter out Hamlet's best soliloquy and subscribe to *The Economist* and read up on Saudi Arabia because that's where I want to go one day and my voice wavers as I try to shed the valley-girl accent I adopted at the most typical of summer-camps, but I can't even drop the *yeah*. So here's this rakish ventriloquist miming away the facts of the world and Beth notices overnight and her dull wet eyes give way to candles and she now gives the greediest hugs, grasping and cooing and wanting to consume this centered little robot because she finally *finally* sees herself in me. When Beth's fourth husband tells me one summer Sunday luncheon that I have my great aunt's nose, her heart explodes into butterflies because he's an authority on beauty, he chose *her* after all, but I remain stoic and glum and roll my eyes around and around because she's gushing, a childless hen watching her golden chick.

Nietzsche wrote that *if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you* and yes, it's out of context, but that's what I've decided to do, only Beth's the one who started gazing first. I gaze back, wearily, not knowing where to start because now that I think about it, she's a

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literary device I've been too intimidated to analyze: what lies beneath that blazing archetype, the shrill fire-haired fiend of my childhood?

1963's Miss Israel was dealt an ancient set of cards, and I try to unshuffle their Delphic wisdom.

It's May 31st, 1962, two years after Israel publicly defies its stereotype of a small scared slaughtered people by dispatching Mossad agents to kidnap Nazi SS Officer Adolf Eichmann straight out of Buenos Aires, and here he is: limp amid the cathartic jeering of a dispossessed people. The type of man you'd imagine would always have icy-cold hands, Eichmann is executed just before midnight in a fogbound prison complex near Tel Aviv wearing what looks like a tweed suit.

The *New York Times* reports that he ate peas, olives, and bread about thirty minutes before his hanging; most newspapers gloss over the personalizing details and stick to highlighting his lack of emotion, stale evil bureaucrat till the end. The Jewish press dances amid its own confetti, reporting that "World Backs Eichmann Hanging" and "Germany Says Justice Is Done by Execution" and this is all just one year before Beth Berenson is crowned the most beautiful woman in the holy land, there to show the world that Israel isn't only strong, it's also jaw-droppingly gorgeous.

It could just be the pageant photograph, but Beth's moonshine skin reflects more light than her diamond tiara. She's only seventeen but has the same long rounded womanly nails she has now, thick butterfly eyelashes, a crystal baton gently propped against a healthy waist, eyebrows a little

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too thin but fitting with 60s style; a red-haired milkmaid, yodeling in the Swiss countryside.

Hebrew words I cannot read line her satin sash, and despite her name literally meaning *Pledged to Yahweh*, she clearly jibes with the Aryan aesthetic, hair sleeker than Grace Kelly's.

I can't help but wonder what Eichmann would have thought of her; she was *gentile-passing*, as my mother's cheesy family used to tell me, especially after she bleached away her freckles before the pageant. They reveled in recounting these alternative histories, likely in retribution for her snobbery towards them—*Polish Jews*, she used to sneer. But she's not there yet: at this moment, she's still soaking up the limelight, *the most beautiful woman in the Holy Land*, but I can't help but imagine that the edges of her sweeping smile are anchored in the oceans she so desperately wants to cross. She's doused in a childish light but it's the cameramen who are most naive—she'll jump out of this costume as soon as she gets the opportunity; she hates Israel and all the suffering it represents.

There's a selfishness in devouring old pictures of my great aunt, as if others could possibly find this young smiling *creature*—which is actually the term they used in the Israeli newspapers—as fascinating as I do. I resurrect these relics from the depths of my father's attic, spend an afternoon downloading footage of the 1963 Miss World pageant, ask my stepmother for *any* juicy anecdotes, but my sources run dry: these labors deliver nothing more than a woman trying hard to be a mannequin, sauntering like soft music across the stage, you can almost see her thinking *walk like a swan walk like an angel spine straighter, feet lighter head bowing right left right left*, a silver-spoon princess twinkling at her admirers, no responsibility here, just silky voices and clouds, and I can't believe she was already performing so well, first time behind a camera and she's already revising history just by the way she *moves*.

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But Beth could just as well have been donning the Israeli Defense Force's ill-fitting canvas garb, could have been a figurine patrolling not this softly-lit stage, but her new nation's fraught borders, a bulky FN MAG machine gun strapped to her back. In the 1960s, beauty pageants were one of few official excuses to delay female military conscription. Exceptional beauty and grisly warfare have always been two sides of the same coin but, gazing upon glittering Beth, you'd think to yourself, *how absurd*.

And that's exactly what the Miss Israel pageant founders wanted you to think.

Makeshift beauty competitions have existed since at least the ill-fated Judgment of Paris (after which a flattered Aphrodite incites the Trojan War), and they've always worked by trying to whitewash the awful power of female beauty. I mean, how ridiculous, the three most supreme goddesses in the Greek Pantheon posing like idiots for a rosy-cheeked prince to decide who is *the fairest*. Even Helen of Troy is perplexed by this story: *I can scarce believe that heavenly beings submitted their beauty to you as arbiter*, she writes in a letter to Paris from Ovid's *Heroides*.

Nationalized and commercialized beauty pageants took off in the 20th century, but this next batch of women lacked heavenly resources and winged escape routes. Painted puckering adolescents were trained to symbolize the attractiveness of a given people, and the vibe was certainly more Botticelli than Hesiod. *La Isha* (Hebrew for "The Woman"), Israel's first so-called *woman's magazine*, held the first Miss Israel Beauty Queen pageant in 1950, just three years after the

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United Nations passed Resolution 181, the Partition of Palestine. Israel had much to prove, primarily its military might in the face of encroaching Arab armies, but *La Isha* was waging an aesthetic battle, a battle against the predominant image of the Jewish woman in Palestine, that glorious socialist portrait of the muscular tilling goddess of the kibbutzim, *making the desert fertile*, sporting straps of ammunition, often photographed dancing in exuberant circles or marching with axes casually resting on honey-crisp shoulders, so powerfully countering the image of weak, brittle Jewish bodies.

La Isha aimed to stuff these sunny visions into Victorian corsets and sickly drawing rooms; their inaugural competition aspired to protect “the beauty, vitality, and charm of the Israeli woman” by making women neurotic about their skin:

It is known that our tropical climate is no help for the beauty of the woman. On the contrary, it detracts her vitality and wears her out. [...] We want to convince you by this beauty competition, which our newspaper plans to hold every year, that in our land [beauty] care is necessary from a young age on.

Today’s Beth Berenson scoffs at skincare products, *abhors* spas, *adores* roasting in the sun (watch her rotate on her beach towel like a suckling pig); Beth’s a woman who, at first glance, intentionally desiccated her beauty after the early death of her husband, saw the *La Isha* announcement at a young age and recognized its falsity, realized that beauty had no inherent value: it was a currency, and should be used as such. Five snow-white poodles, an Italian-marble sunroom, an army of Picassos—an exquisite canvas, to be sure, but then there’s great aunt Beth amid it all, a strident leather puddle commanding an army of servants—reveling in the true fruits

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of her beauty, not preservation but acquisition. It's as if she called up Helen of Troy and asked for a simple exchange: drain the aquiline nose, the cherry lips, the Modigliani neck, and grant me this estate; now, *I can live exactly how I like*.

Constructed, flattened, sanitized, such *stingy* motivations—the *La Isha* vision ignores the most interesting part of beauty, that some people *just happen* to be born beautiful and there's damn little you can do about it; mop yourself in Sisley face cream, but as Herodotus tells us, a miraculous intervention is needed to alter the unsightly, and for good reason: extreme beauty is equally cursed. Scroll I of *Histories* spins a tale of fickle fate, where Helen of Troy's ghost, by the swish of her hand, grants beauty to a particularly ugly baby: *she stroked the child's head and said that she would be the most beautiful woman in all Sparta*—we snare in jealousy but forget the toxicity of beauty, that although this nameless woman later becomes Queen of Sparta, she's plagued by a lustful phantom who destroys her family's reputation. Beautiful women are obvious scapegoats, radiating their suspicious golden glow.

Beth was born already-blessed by Helen: she was deemed to be so beautiful upon birth that nurses reportedly convened to witness the red-haired prophetess exit the womb—dripping 6-pound orb belting her arrival in sublime style, still-blind eyes shining a muscular green, newly-oiled cherub flesh, *happy to be here, so happy to be here*, shooting forth a full-toothed smile met with oohs and ahs, a babe doomed to eternal ogling, *rosy-fingered dawn* itself, rising up from her cradle at Hadassah Hospital, Jerusalem, on July 22nd, 1946—the very same day the Jewish paramilitary group, the Irgun, famously bombed the King David Hotel, headquarters of the British military command, killing over 90 people. And I don't know the exact *time* of Beth's birth, but, shrouded in mystery, it's as if her arrival somehow set off the chains of ammunition,

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burst the southern wing of the fanciest hotel around—as if dozens of men were struck down, not by bomb, but by thunderbolt; as if Zeus himself was announcing not the birth of a hero, but of something far harder to pin down.

The Book of Judith, written sometime in the Hasmonean Dynasty (c.140-116 BCE), provides a compelling counterimage to *La Isha's* vision of the ideal Israeli woman, one more in line with Beth's shameless persona. Judith of Bethulia is warrior-strong *and* beautiful; she would've hung Eichmann on the pageant stage for extra effect. Even her name, which literally means *Jewess*, acts as prophecy, denoting her role as *the ideal Jewish woman* chosen by Yahweh to perform the heroic act of saving Israel from the Assyrian army, currently laying siege to Mount Bethulia.

Ashamed by the Israelites' cowardice and impiety, Judith decides to take the matter into her own hands, but it's only after she beautifies herself *to entice the eyes of all the men who might see her* that she's able to accomplish her divine labor. She exchanges her dowdy widow's sack for jewelry and sandals and even a tiara, and despite Bethulia's dwindling water supply, Judith *bathed her body with water and anointed herself with precious ointment* like Hera does whenever she tries to distract Zeus and sabotage his plans. One function of beauty, sometimes forgotten, is its ability to soften and endear, *the tiger-claw beneath the glove* as Nietzsche writes. But usually there's a precondition: you have to be terrifyingly beautiful, *a limb-loosener* as Sappho calls it, a face so symmetrical it burns.

Like King Midas' touch turning everything to gold, Judith of Bethulia's mere presence liquefies the violent resolve of war-hardened men. *Open the gate* she commands, and the Israelites

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scramble to unlatch the iron structure; their beady, hunger-yellow eyes follow her hips as she descends into the enemy encampment. An aggressively garnished woman, Judith marches straight into a group of meandering Assyrian soldiers; she straightens the spine clenches the abs and requests to see general Holofernes; they acquiesce, of course, the army is suddenly a river spilling over her demands. 100 of these puppy-men escort her to the General's tent, and the remaining Assyrians reflect upon the recently-departed vision, asking themselves: *Who can despise [the Israelites], who have women like this among them?* and it's because of this star-spangled reaction that Judith is able to behead Assyrian general Holofernes, an act she performs cleanly, striking his neck twice, no mention of spurting blood, and then hands the head to her trusty maid, who drops it into their food basket, otherwise filled with Kosher snacks and some yummy cheese laced with mollifying herbs.

It's the casualness of Beth's task that's breathtaking; it's those visceral juxtapositions that strike deep over time. The blinding beauty and fresh gore and ordinary foods, all smashed together into a catharsis like that of Eichmann's hanging body—an image infused with cosmic significance, the triumph of the Israelites against all odds, and ha, *by a woman's hand*.

The Hasmonean Dynasty was a short-lived autonomous Jewish kingdom forged through heroic bloodbath against the Seleucid Empire. Israel, on the other hand, was founded in the shadow of the humiliating Holocaust: in 1947, thirty-three countries, troubled by widespread complicity in genocide (and lobbied by pro-Jewish groups), validated the creation of Israel by passing Resolution 181. But nationhood is far from automatic, and for the next two decades, Israel forges a bevy of diplomatic ties, striving to gain legitimacy through international recognition. So, while

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Judith of Bethulia got to literally *disarm men with the beauty of her face* to advance the Jewish national cause, Beth Berenson is stuck groveling before the world's Jewry; personified propaganda.

After losing the Miss World pageant to Miss Jamaica, Beth travels around the globe selling Israeli war bonds, which seems to have meant showing up at pro-Israel functions and looking swell and saying things like *I want to correct erroneous images of life in the Jewish State* and rooms of fawning ladies erupt into proud clapping; surely her beauty at least *disarmed men* of their wallets. The *Bnai Brith Messenger*, her faithful documentarian, comes out with headlines like:



**Titian-Haired Beth Flashes
Her Green Eyes For Bonds**

Judith's appearance paralyzes men into submission, but it's also her eloquent speech that sustains their attention; she's an infamous manipulator—just like Aphrodite, the *weaver of wiles*—and her appeal to Holofernes is rife with double meanings and cowering praises. *It is reported throughout the whole world that you alone are the best in the whole kingdom, the most informed and the most astounding in military strategy*, she coos, calling herself his *slave*. Persuaded by her supplications, Holofernes grants Judith her own tent, and even waits a couple days before he tries to rape her—her diction commands respect. The Assyrians affirm her talent: *No other woman from one end of the earth to the other looks so beautiful or speaks so wisely!* and I think of all the fawning newspapermen who sing Beth's praises; *a bundle of beauty and brains*, they squeal, and this headline reveals the worst of it:

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Miss Israel: Five Languages Plus Three Great Dimensions

weighs in at 117 lbs., which are distributed over a frame featuring measurements of 36-23-36.

But while Judith lies to the Assyrian soldiers in order to ultimately save the Israelites, Beth misleads the Jewish press in order to eventually escape Israel. Exiting the godforsaken desert is no simple matter, but you'd think it would be easier than all this air-blown enthusiasm. Her exuberant Zionism detracts attention from her real intentions:

WITH SUCH a combination of beauty and brains at her command, Miss Israel 1963 has a naturally incisive attitude toward current affairs. "Who is the greatest man in the world today?" There is no doubt in Beth Berenson's mind. "Why, David Ben-Gurion, of course."

Within three months of selling war bonds, Beth Berenson meets a foreign banker and *poof* she jumps out of Israeli history and into the veiny arms of a much older man.

When the Assyrian soldiers first encounter Judith of Bethulia, they demand she identify herself, and oh what a reply she gave: *I am a daughter of the Hebrews, but I am fleeing from them, for they are about to be handed over to you to be devoured.* I imagine Beth's older lover with a glint

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in his eye asking the same question, and I wish I could have heard her serenade, her saving grace, the first version of her story. Where *did* she come from? I know she never went back.

Proust rightly says that *the countries which we long for occupy, at any given moment, a far larger place in our actual life than the country in which we happen to be*, so maybe it's unsurprising that today's Beth remembers little of things past, almost nothing of Israel—a newborn country that, as Beth herself came of age, was in the midst of constructing its own national identity. I picture poor dusty streets and ethnic tension and hard work; but then, amid it all, spectacled Zionist leaders busy tying the brutal present to the glorious biblical past.

Early Zionist leaders had the daunting task of assimilating an emotionally distraught and culturally disparate population of diaspora Jews; hence the linguistic revival of the ancient Hebrew language, hence a 1948 directive requiring that senior politicians and IDF generals Hebraize their surnames. Explaining the latter decree, Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion argued for a government and military that was *Hebrew in spirit, vision, and in all its internal and external expressions*. Decades earlier, Ben-Gurion had changed his family name from Polish Grün to that of a Jewish general who campaigned against the Roman Empire in the 2nd century AD. Most leaders took on these heavily symbolic, mythologizing names; young Israel was a land of anachronistic self-invention.

Beth's father David Berenson originally hailed from Jobar, a largely-Jewish suburb of Damascus that featured an impressive and now-destroyed 2000-year-old synagogue. The third son of a long line of prosperous silversmiths, he went off to study metallurgy at La Sapienza in Rome, and

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returned home in 1934 to find Jobar in near ruins: the resurgence of the Damascus blood libel, and the government's seizure of Jewish assets, left his family on the brink of exile. I find clues wherever I can: the preeminent Israeli broadsheet of the 1930s, *The Palestinian Post* (now: *The Jerusalem Post*), published three identical advertisements in June 1934:

JERUSALEM to DAMASCUS
OR
DAMASCUS to JERUSALEM

Direct daily service every morning at 8 o'clock,
in 6 and 4 seater cars.

You will find our service comfortable and safe.

Day and Night service to all parts of Palestine and Egypt.

Branches : on the highways.

For full particulars apply in
JERUSALEM : Orient Motor Car Service
Tel. 524 Julian's way DAMASCUS : Garage Oranyad
Tel. 10—46

Price : 750 mils per person.

And that's when they went, 1934, to the city of cities, Jerusalem, likely penniless save for precious heirlooms. I imagine a red Fez resting on David's greasy hair, tattered suit and briefcase of letters, a sad swagger towards a rusted jeep. He stands staunch and scholarly in my great aunt's mind, so maybe that's where I get the image of a Renaissance man who made the most of his circumstances, conducted business in Ladino and salon gatherings in French and Italian, had friends peppered all around the world—for her, an archetype, and she spouts his truisms whenever she gets a chance: she slips on a wet cobblestone in Edinburgh, *a change of scene, a change of fortune*, whenever I dare interrupt her, *when someone speaks, close your mouth and open your ears*, and so on, each more obvious and superstitious than the last.

She describes him as a distinguished clockmaker, but it doesn't add up: in all three existing photographs, he's pictured in front of the same weapons factory, dressed identically, sporting a thin mustache, clear-rimmed spectacles, a handkerchief, and a wide silk tie. Despite his gecko-like stance and crooked grimace, he was clearly a man who valued appearances—look at his

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wife, Berlin-born Anna Berenson, once the neighborhood beauty. String-bean body clear as day, but her face is always caught off-guard by the camera: a movement to one side, an itch above the eyebrow, and she's immortalized as a foggy, maladapted figure.

Beth has a small cache of edited and sanitized stories she loves to tell me, over and over again. Her favorite is the one about how, after she professed her desire at 14 to be a model, her uncle quelled her stage-lust by taking her to a nearby studio in Haifa. In a voice that relishes its perfect Italian intonations, holding her rolled *r* like a blessing, she describes her intellectual awakening. At the Haifa studios, she witnessed the plight of models: being ordered around and accosted by photographers, *che brutto!* she gasps on cue, *non era elegante*.

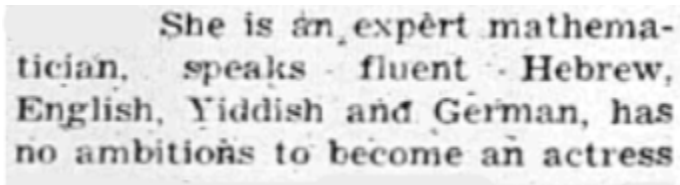
Horrified by the maltreatment of beautiful beings, she decided to pursue an alternative life, *la vita dell'artista*, as she calls it, which really means painting her gardens over and over again—plopped like an ornamental hen on her gilded veranda, flanked by Doric columns, plump sun-speckled hand dashing petals by day—and turning herself into an encyclopedia about medieval woodcuts and memorizing the entirety of Alexander Pope's poetry by night. There's a gluttony in all she does: the pyramids of cucumber sandwiches; announcing 10-minute all-you-can-hold shopping sprees; always downing too many Bloody Marys. And the artistry and learning fall straight into this category: they're excessive, they're memorized, they're whipped out and used as a prop just like the jewels that ooze over her alabaster neck, more astonishing than valuable.

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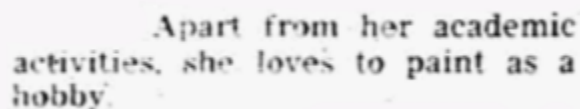
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I could criticize her anecdotes for centuries, but what's important is this early vision of herself as a woman of intellect and artistic talent; blessed with good looks, but they certainly don't define her:



She is an expert mathematician, speaks fluent Hebrew, English, Yiddish and German, has no ambitions to become an actress

and



Apart from her academic activities, she loves to paint as a hobby.

Helen of Troy was also an artist, but people forget that. In the *Iliad*, Homer first portrays Helen trapped in the Trojan palace, *weaving a great cloth, a crimson cloak of double-thickness*, a robe widely noted for its atypical narrative scene: *the many trials of the Trojan horse-bearers and bronze-clad Achaeans, trials which for her sake they had suffered under the hand of Ares*. Helen looks out her window and skillfully depicts the carnage of war, her sorry circumstances; *shining among women*, she embroiders beauty's sour yield. More so than anyone, Helen knows about the fault lines of beauty. After weaving, she's found *weeping soft tears*, craving her warm husband and child, deploring her confinement.

I imagine that Beth despised her life abroad, too; maybe it was better than what Israel could have offered, but her flabby drooling mate and isolated estate seem pretty rough to me. My father's

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favorite adjective to describe Beth is *misanthropic*: she avoided her first husband *like the plague*; she painted or ate or just sat outside staring into the grassy distance as he remained glued to his wheelchair, perpetually tuned into one of the BBC's 19th century-inspired TV series. But even since his early death, Beth rarely leaves her small kingdom, refuses to learn how to drive, developed an erratic eating schedule and sometimes sleeps all day.

Father scoffs at her one-track life, a life lived for no one but herself, a series of attractive young husbands consumed like pies; for him, it's clearly an aberration of nature, a woman who refuses to sacrifice herself for others, who takes all she can get. But there are many corruptions of her tale, as there are of Helen's. I tend to side with Helen. She doesn't seem like the type of woman who would choose to leave her family, but who knows. Beth is easier to malign; less air-brushed by centuries of passed-down mythology.

Judith of Bethulia, too, was a young widow, her husband struck down by heat-stroke while bundling harvested wheat; and he, too, left behind quite the assortment, so much so that *no one spoke ill of [Judith]*; how could they, with all her *gold and silver, men and women slaves, livestock and fields*; and, all the more for it: she alone *maintained this estate*.

Beth manages her own property, but she fails to command much respect. Cliques of preening ladies occasionally pay her homage, come for tea, digest tabloids; but how could these women understand where she came from? What do they have in common aside from their small kingdoms? It must be exhausting, faces frozen in stepford smiles, spinning silly stories, Beth trying to traverse these gulfs but getting too tired and giving up. Judith was celebrated by her people, while Beth languished in exile.

When Judith of Bethulia shows Holofernes' head to the Israelites, she also announces her military commands, and what a sight it must have been: her iridescent moonlit face dappled with beads of sweat, a fresh bloodied head dripping its gore beside it, her voice thundering battle instructions: *when the sun is up let every man take his arms*; and, come morning, the Israelites are roused to action by this fair damsel and they descend upon the Assyrians *as one man*; their collective furor and grief and exhaustion explode, and the Assyrian camps are razed, mangled, looted to the core.

But Judith's story was likely composed as an explicitly allegorical take on female power by a Jewish-Greek member of the Jerusalem intelligentsia; obvious historical and geographical details were altered to make Judith's figurative status extra-clear. With a forged persona, of course she's overwhelmingly heroic (and Hellenized). *Crowned with olive wreaths*, she even gets to sing her own victory song *with all Israel round her* before her story ends: *Woe to the nations who rise against my race!*

Helen of Troy never chants a tambourine-tuned victory song, but she's finally reunited with her family in the *Odyssey* and, no longer needing to code her thoughts into her elaborate cloak, how self-aware she's revealed to be: *they made my face the cause that hounded them* she says to her husband about the whole Trojan debacle, flipping that annoying and perennial phrase: *the face that launched one thousand ships*. Helen's face didn't *launch* anything; she was kidnapped, and her beauty used as a pretense for an inevitable war.

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Beth Berenson could say aloud what she's likely known for decades, that it wasn't all her fault. Her own family calls her *a traitor to Israel*, but they, like most people, struggle to see through the blinding light of excessive beauty, cannot visualize the thinking woman considering her options: to stand vulnerable on the Israeli frontier, or shiver upon a shimmering stage? She would have been reviled either way. Men rarely allow women like Judith of Bethulia to get past the city gates; when such a woman transgresses boundaries, she typically ends up like Helen, blamed for immense catastrophe, denied even a morsel of glory. What can a woman like Beth do, carrying all these ingredients of tragedy? Evade the machine-gun, drop the baton.

She'll probably live like Judith until the happy age of 105—arthritis aches massaged away, tubes of vaseline irrigating tanning-bed burns, Balkan music ringing through the halls; she'll wax poetic about Boccaccio's satire and the tackiness of adorning one's house with Chinese ceramics; she'll reduce her nephews to tears at least once a month on the phone, and, when I visit her this summer, she'll begin yelping if I even so much as dip my toe in the pool, because she's worried about my health. But I know that layers of trauma and anxieties and just sheer loneliness are folded into her antics; I know that she'll never sing as joyously as Judith or speak as plainly as Helen.

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