

4.20

# THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

and

## JOSEPH

by

**NOLA HAYES**

**Note:** The first scene of "Joseph" is suitable for presentation alone, by smaller groups, as a sketch.

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DEDICATION:

*To the Greater Glory of God  
and in gratitude to  
Rev. Arthur O.*

“THE FIRST CHRISTMAS”

CHARACTERS

MARY

JOSEPH

INNKEEPER

OBED (Old Shepherd)

EBER (Shepherd)

AZOR (Young Shepherd,  
is beardless)

ANGEL

“THE FIRST CHRISTMAS”

SCENE I

CARPENTER'S WORKSHOP *with bench and a few tools on it, and two stools on one side. At the bench, JOSEPH is examining a length of wood. Enter MARY from Left with a covered basket of food on her arm.*

MARY: Joseph! (*Coming closer.*) Joseph, here is your lunch!

JOSEPH (*looks up, smiling*): I didn't hear you come in Mary!

MARY (*amused*): I know! (*Places her basket on the bench and examines the wood.*) What is this to be?

JOSEPH: The handle of a plough. I'm a little behind with the orders since I cut my hand. (*Looks at his hand.*) Ah well. I'll just have to work faster now it is better.

MARY (*uncovering the basket*): You work too hard as it is.

JOSEPH (*fingering the wood*): I must finish this for Tubal. He's waiting on it. He broke his other plough and wanted it repaired at first. (*Sigh.*) But it was so old it would have broken somewhere else before long. (*Puts down wood.*) So he ordered a new one!

MARY (*taking his arm*): Well, have a rest now, and eat.

JOSEPH: Oh yes. I'd forgotten it was lunch time.  
(*He pulls up the two stools, leads her to one and sits upon the other. He takes the basket from bench.*)

JOSEPH: What have you brought to-day?

MARY (*taking basket from him*): Fish, and bread I baked, myself. (*She uncovers basket and he peers in, takes a piece of bread and eats.*)

JOSEPH (*approvingly*): Mmmm!

MARY: How long do you think it will take to complete Tubal's plough?

JOSEPH: Oh . . . (*gestures indifferently*) . . . I don't know.  
Why?

MARY: Because we must leave soon for Bethlehem.

JOSEPH (*stops eating, and stares*): For . . . where?

MARY: Bethlehem.

JOSEPH: Whatever for?

MARY: Because that is the city where we were born. (*Explains*) Caesar Augustus has issued a proclamation that a census be taken, and . . .

JOSEPH: A census!

MARY: And all persons must return to their birthplace to be registered.

(*JOSEPH rises, walks away in disgust, stops.*)

JOSEPH: Well Caesar chose a wonderful time to think of it!  
(*MARY puts the basket down, goes to comfort him.*)

MARY: Don't worry, Joseph. Get the plough made, first!

JOSEPH: That's not what I'm thinking of.

MARY: The other orders could wait . . .

JOSEPH: I'm not worried about those, either. (*Turns to her*):  
Mary, it's you! (*He turns away again and commences to pace the floor. She watches him.*)

MARY: We've travelled that far before, haven't we?

JOSEPH: Yes. But it was a long time ago, when you were in better health!

MARY: I'm all right. When have you heard me complain?  
(*He comes back, takes her hands in his.*)

JOSEPH: Never! But, my dear, do you really feel equal to it?

MARY: Joseph . . . listen to me! No woman in the world has been blessed such as I. With the special promise of

God within my heart, I am strengthened to make any journey! (*Tenderly*) Don't you understand?

(*They regard each other for a moment, then JOSEPH nods, smiling.*)

MARY: Now will you come and have some food?

JOSEPH: All right.

(*They walk back to the stools and sit down. MARY offers him more food, and he takes some.*)

MARY: Many of our people were born in Bethlehem. I suppose we shall see them there.

JOSEPH: I expect so. (*He begins to eat.*)

MARY: When Jorim and Elim heard about the census, they left almost at once, hoping to miss the crowd.

JOSEPH (*pausing, looks at her thoughtfully*): That's something we must consider, too. There will be a great demand for lodgings in Bethlehem. Perhaps the earlier we arrive there, the better.

MARY (*smiling*): Whatever you say, Joseph dear. I will be ready when you are!

(*He stands up, draws her to her feet.*)

JOSEPH: Then go home and rest, Mary. To-morrow we shall leave very early. Then we should cover some distance before the heat of the day.

MARY: Yes. That is a good idea.

(*She unpacks the rest of his lunch on to the bench and takes up the empty basket. He walks her across stage to Left exit, and pauses. He places a forefinger under her chin, tilts her face up*) . . .

MARY (*smiling*): I'll remember!

JOSEPH: Remember, a very early start in the morning!

(Exit MARY. JOSEPH stands near the exit a moment, smiles and waves good-bye. Then he goes back to his bench.)

Curtain.

(During Scene Change an offstage Choir hums tune "O Come All Ye Faithful" . . . fading away for Scene II.)

## SCENE II

A STABLE. A pitchfork and a manger stand against the wall near Right exit. A pile of clean straw, centre stage. From Left, enter INNKEEPER with a red lantern. MARY and JOSEPH, in travelling cloaks, follow him in. JOSEPH carries a small bundle of clothing. MARY looks around her appraisingly, JOSEPH in dismay, the INNKEEPER apologetically.

INNKEEPER: I'm afraid this is the best I can do for you, now there's no room left at the inn. Perhaps it will be better than nothing. (Indicates straw) The straw is fresh, and you could sleep on it. (Sets down the lantern.) This is always a busy time of year, for us. And now (turns to Mary and gestures helplessly) the census is bringing even more people into Bethlehem.

MARY: Yes, of course. (Smiles.) I think we shall manage very well.

INNKEEPER (turning to go): If you need more straw, I can send a boy with some.

(JOSEPH looks at Mary; she shakes her head.)

JOSEPH: No thank you, sir. (Sets his bundle down.)

INNKEEPER: Then I'll wish you both good-night.

JOSEPH: Good-night, sir.

MARY: Good-night, sir . . . and thank you, again!

(Exit INNKEEPER to Left. MARY and JOSEPH look at one another..)

MARY: The innkeeper is a kindly fellow, Joseph!

JOSEPH: Yes, but . . . (gestures in anguish). A stable! In a cave! Oh, Mary, this isn't much to bring you to, after a long journey! And it's been very trying, since we arrived!

MARY: I don't mind. I think we are fortunate in having the offer.

(She walks to the straw and sinks down upon it.)

JOSEPH: We are, but . . . what will your people think?

MARY: They will know you did your best for me, as you always do. (Removes her cloak.) Dear Joseph, you worry too much! (Commences to make a bed in the straw with her cloak.) Instead, you should trust all things to God!

(He removes his cloak and gives it to her.)

JOSEPH: Well, there's no doubt that everything comes out all right when we do . . .

(He turns away, paces the floor thoughtfully.)

MARY: Of course! You wanted the plough done for Tubal before we left Nazareth . . .

(He stops pacing, turns back to her, smiling.)

JOSEPH: And it was finished . . . with time to spare! (Gestures.) Of course, I wasn't to know your father would offer to deliver the orders for me. That saved at least two hours!

MARY (pausing to look at him): Well, that's just it, isn't it? You never know! That's why you should trust, and not worry!

JOSEPH (crossing over to her): You never cease to amaze me! Truly, you are a woman of remarkable faith! No wonder the Lord has smiled upon you! (Kneels to help her arrange the bedding, pats it) There! How's that? Try it, Mary!

(She sits upon the bedding, smiles.)

MARY: I couldn't be more comfortable at home!

JOSEPH (*rising, well pleased*): I'll just see that the door is firmly closed. (*Crosses to Left exit, goes offstage a moment. We hear wood latched upon wood, then he enters again.*) There! We shouldn't catch much of a draught now!

(*He sits down beside her, takes her hands in his.*)

JOSEPH: Well, my dear, our duty is done by Caesar. We've registered in Bethlehem, and after a night's rest, we can be on our way home! (*He is thoughtful as he calculates, but MARY looks doubtful.*) If we leave to-morrow morning early, and we make the same time as we did coming, we . . . (*looks at her*) we should reach Nazareth about . . .

MARY: Joseph . . . I . . . I think we might not be able to leave in the morning.

JOSEPH: Not . . . ?

MARY: I . . . think the time is near when God's promise will be fulfilled and . . . and I shall become a mother!

JOSEPH: (*in consternation*): But . . . (*looks around him*). Oh Mary! Not *here!*

(*As she speaks, the lights dim slowly and a soft spotlight centres in upon them.*)

MARY: Why not? We are of the lineage of David. And is this not the city of David?

(*JOSEPH nods, holding her hands tightly.*)

MARY: Then what better birthplace for He who is to be Lord and Saviour of all?

(*He bows his face reverently down on to her hands and she looks upon his bent head with compassion.*)

*Curtain.*

(*During Scene Change, offstage Choir softly renders "While shepherds watched their flocks by night". Fade away for Scene III.*)

### SCENE III

NIGHT. *Soft lighting only, leaving corners of stage well shadowed.* OBED and EBER *sit by dying embers of fire, centre stage, their crooks upon the ground beside them (or staves).*

EBER: It's a lovely night, Obed. The flock has settled down and you wouldn't think there was a wolf or a thief within miles!

OBED: Indeed? when you have been tending sheep as long as I, you'll know better!

EBER: Yes, with the lambing season just over, beasts of prey will be lurking in the dark . . . four footed *and* two!

OBED (*suddenly*): Hush! Somebody's coming!  
(*They peer intently to Right exit of stage, OBED reaching for his staff.*)

EBER: It's all right; it is Azor. (*Calls*) Azor!

AZOR (*offstage*): Eber! Obed!  
(*OBED lays his staff down again. AZOR comes on from Right, carrying staff.*)

EBER: Come, lad! What brings you in from your fold?

AZOR: My curiosity!

OBED: The young ones are full of riddles these days! What has your curiosity to do with your neglect of the flock?

(*AZOR squats down beside the fire, lays down his staff. He rubs his hands together and looks up at the sky.*)

AZOR (*to Obed*): Listen to me, Old One! Many nights I have watched the stars and I thought I knew them all. But to-night . . . I saw, out there . . . (*he stops, searching the sky with his eyes. . . Yes! There it is! (He points, above Right exit, and they follow his gaze.)*) There is the new one!

EBER: I see it, Azor. I see your star! (*Turns to Obed*) It is larger than the rest, and brighter. Do you know it, Obed?

OBED: Larger . . . brighter? (*Pause.*) This is strange . . .  
Yes, I see it, my son, but I do not know it. (*Turns to Azor*) When did you first sight it?

AZOR: Just now. And even as I hastened to you, it seemed to grow bigger . . . to move!

OBED: Stars do not move . . . unless they fall. You must have imagined it.

AZOR: It moves again! (*Pointing*) Look!  
(*Slowly they rise to their feet, staring far to Right.*)

EBER: It comes toward us! (*Fearfully*) Obed, will it fall?

OBED (*worried*): I don't know . . . I don't know . . .

AZOR: I told you it moved!  
(*EBER rubs his eyes. Far-off Choir begins to sing the anthem "Glory to God in the highest", and continues under the following. Gradually bring lights up on stage.*)

AZOR: I can't stand the brightness. (*Shields his eyes.*)

EBER: I have never seen anything like it! The whole place is lighting up like day. I don't like this!

OBED: Nor do I. (*Fearfully*) Let us get away from here!  
(*They turn to flee, but AZOR stops them.*)

AZOR: Look! (*He points to Right entrance on stage where an ANGEL stands gazing at them. They cower back.*)

ANGEL: Fear not! (*Extends his arms toward them.*) Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people. For unto you is born in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord! (*Pause.*) And this shall be a sign unto you. You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger! (*ANGEL moves slowly backwards and offstage. Choir to fade down and out as light fades away. Stage is left shadowed as before. Astounded, Shepherds turn to each other.*)

AZOR: Gone! The angel has gone!

EBER: And for a moment . . . I thought I saw the sky full of them . . . all praising God!

OBED: So did I. But now, they are all gone, too. (*Looks about him.*)

AZOR: What do you think of it, Old One?

OBED (*thoughtfully*): A Saviour, he said . . . (*turns to the others.*) I can remember my grandfather saying the prophets foretold the coming of a Saviour. There would be a King born of the Tribe of David.

EBER: My father speaks of it yet . . . with a sort of . . . sad hope. He said it is a long time since the Jews were promised a deliverer.

AZOR: Well, we all heard what the angel said!

OBED: Then to-night it seems an ancient prophecy may be realised.

AZOR: You know, I felt there was something special about to-night. First, seeing the star, and then . . . listen!

(*They listen.*)

EBER: I hear nothing.

OBED (*cupping hand to his ear*): Nor I.

AZOR: That's what I mean. No wolf cries in the distance . . . It's so peaceful . . . (*Suddenly*) When can we go and see the new baby?

OBED: Since this is the event of a lifetime, I'm of a mind to set out at once!

EBER: But the sheep!

AZOR: Somehow I feel that to-night no harm will come to anything . . . or anyone. Can't you sense a sort of . . . heavenly calm spread over everything?

EBER: You're right, Azor. Since the angel came, I had noticed something . . . different.

AZOR: Then it is settled? We all go? Now?

OBED: Very well.

*(They commence to gather their staves.)*

AZOR *(suddenly)*: Wait! What about a gift for the baby!  
*(They regard one another . . . OBED fingers his beard.)*

OBED: We really should, you know.

EBER: But what could we give him? A bright new coin would be pleasing, but I haven't a coin to my name. Have you?

*(He turns to the others anxiously.)*

AZOR *(shaking his head)*: I had two yesterday. And I bought fig cakes with them. I wish I hadn't, now.

OBED *(to Eber)*: That's youth, for you. Wishing to-day they hadn't done what they did yesterday! Ah, well. *(Points to Left exit with his staff.)* Let's make a start, anyhow.

*(They take a few steps, when EBER stops them, pointing above and to left.)*

EBER: Look! The star . . . it moves ahead as though to guide us.

OBED: Then let us follow it!  
*(They turn to move off, but AZOR stops them.)*

AZOR: Wait! I have it!

*(They turn back to stare at him.)*

OBED: What have you?

AZOR: An idea! We can select the best of our fat lambs to take to the child!

OBED *(well pleased)*: Of course!

EBER: Why didn't we think of it before?

*(Happily they move off to Left exit.)*

*Curtain.*

*(Choir to sing "Once in Royal David's City" during Scene change. Fade down and out for opening of Scene IV.)*

#### SCENE IV

STABLE, *with manger and pile of straw centre stage*, MARY and JOSEPH *sit in the straw beside the empty manger*, MARY *nursing the Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes.*

MARY: Look, Joseph, isn't he perfect?

JOSEPH *(reverently)*: This is a beautiful child, Mary . . . sent from God, to bring new hope to a fainting race . . .

MARY *(tenderly)*: And enough love for all of the world!  
*(Loud knocking on door, Left, offstage. MARY is alarmed, and cradles the Baby closer to her. She looks at Joseph.)*

MARY: Joseph! Who can it be, at this late hour?

JOSEPH: Hush, my dear. I'll go and see.

*(He rises, walks almost offstage to Left, pauses. MARY tucks the Baby into the manger and remains kneeling beside it.)*

JOSEPH *(calls)*: Who is it? *(Pause.)* Who's there?

OBED *(offstage)*: Don't be afraid . . . we are not robbers. We are humble shepherds!

*(JOSEPH steps offstage for a second. We hear wooden door unlatched, then he steps back onstage.)*

JOSEPH: Three shepherds . . . at this time of night?  
*(OBED steps onstage, carrying a bundle. He looks earnestly at Joseph.)*

OBED: We saw a vision that told the birth of a Saviour. We were guided here by a star, so we thought this must be the place. And the innkeeper said we might find a baby here, because . . .

JOSEPH *(suddenly understands)*: Yes. Come in.

(EBER comes onstage beside Obed. He carries a bundle and a bunch of lilies.)

EBER: We have brought gifts. (He indicates Azor who, off-stage, waits to be invited in.)

JOSEPH: Thank you very much. (To Azor) I wonder could you leave the lambs outside for the moment? (Pause.) That's right. (Pause, then with a smile) Come in!

(JOSEPH moves back to allow the Three Shepherds to come forward. EBER holds out his gifts.)

EBER: A little fruit we gathered along the way . . . and some flowers for the new mother!

(They look to Mary who smiles a welcome. JOSEPH goes to Mary, stands with one hand upon her shoulder. In awe, the Shepherds come closer.)

EBER: Then it is all true! See? There is the Christ-child, wrapped in swaddling clothes . . .

AZOR: And lying in a manger. Just as the angel said!  
(Reverently EBER and OBED place their gifts before Mary and step back so the holy family is not obscured.)

OBED: Praise be unto the Lord!  
(Shepherds bow their heads for a moment, then slowly look back to the child in the manger.)

OBED (with emotion): Ah, when I think of it! That these old eyes of mine should be spared to gaze upon this holy child!

EBER (in awe): When so many before us have longed for this sight . . .

OBED: Prayed for it!

EBER: Lived and died without knowing the glory of this moment . . . of His coming!

AZOR: Little wonder that the heavens opened and the angels sang! (Turns to Obed): Old One, you are rich in wisdom and in dreams. You must bestow a blessing upon the babe!

OBED: No, my son. (Indicates manger.) Blessed are we, and all who come before this welcome little Saviour! For the prophecy to Israel . . . is fulfilled!

(They sink to their knees before the manger. Offstage Choir begins to sing one verse of "Silent Night" while spotlight centres gradually in on group and other lights are dimmed. On final line of verse, the Curtain is drawn.)

THE END.

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#### PROPERTIES

Wooden workbench.  
2 Wooden stools.  
6ft. length wood.  
Basket, covered.  
Bread.  
Manger.  
Pitchfork.  
Pile of straw.  
Red lantern.  
Joseph's bundle of clothing.  
3 Crooks or staves.  
Bunch of Lilies.  
2 "Gift" bundles tied up in cloth,  
one containing fruit.  
Tiny imitation campfire.

“JOSEPH”

CHARACTERS

<i>Hebrew:</i>	<i>Egyptian:</i>
JOSEPH (beardless throughout)	PHARAOH
REUBEN (bearded)	BUTLER
JUDAH (bearded)	ASENATH
SIMEON	WISE MAN 1
ASHER	WISE MAN 2
LEVI	4 WISE MEN
BENJAMIN	2 SLAVES
5 BROTHERS	
TIRAS	

*Notes:*

Benjamin to clearly resemble Joseph, with black hair and distinct black eyebrows. Joseph appears with shoulder-length hair from Scene II onward. In Scene I his coat is to have some purple in it. He has a change of clothing for Scenes II, III and IV. Brothers to dress slightly differently in Scenes III and IV. Tiras to have shoulder-length hair throughout. Pharaoh to wear gold chain about his neck and gold ring on his finger. Appropriate music may be rendered during scene changes. Tiras to exit backwards before Joseph only when the brothers are present . . . a deference intended for their benefit.

*Smaller groups may present Scene I separately as a sketch.*

“JOSEPH”

SCENE I

THE PLAINS OF DOTHAN. *Joseph's brothers, excepting BENJAMIN (ten in all) are resting, some on rolled-up cloaks; some drink from waterskins and pass them around.*

SIMEON: Reuben, how long shall we graze the flocks here at Dothan? It will take time to get them back to Hebron.

REUBEN: Well, it has been some weeks now, Simeon, so . . .

LEVI (*interjecting*): Who minds how long we are away from home? At least we are away from Joseph! Away from the sickening sight of Father's devotion to him!

REUBEN: It's no use being angry about it, Levi. Joseph has always been Father's favourite, and nothing can change that.

SIMEON (*outburst*): But why should he be the most important in Father's eyes? (*To REUBEN*) Are you not the firstborn, Reuben? You should resent it more than the rest of us!

REUBEN: Resent it? (*Shrug.*) I understand it, Simeon. That makes the difference!

*(They all stop to listen to Reuben.)*

REUBEN: Joseph was born late in Father's life: he was born to Rachel long after it was thought she would have no children. That is the miracle that endears him to Jacob our Father!

SIMEON: Well, it will take more than a miracle to endear him to me!

JUDAH: I could understand it better, if it had been young Benjamin . . . he was born to Rachel after Joseph, and she died. (*Pause.*) Benjamin is the baby of the family so to speak. (*Sigh.*) And he is going to be handsome like Joseph. I pray he will not also have his arrogance!

REUBEN: I think Joseph's arrogance is quite unconscious, my brothers. He knows he is favoured, and he accepts this, just as, perhaps, we should. After all, who is going to change our Father?

LEVI: I'd like to change coats, that's what I'd like!

SIMEON: Yes! Have you ever seen anything like that coat Father gave him? It even has long sleeves. I believe he had it especially made!

JUDAH: He did. And with all those colours in it; even purple, which is usually reserved for one of high office.

LEVI: Well, Joseph considers himself to be somebody. Just ask him!

*(Chorus of churlish laughter.)*

ASHER: The thing I don't like is the way he puffs himself up relating these dreams he has. Or says he has!

SIMEON: Yes! Can you imagine? *(Sarcasm, with gestures.)* We were all binding sheaves in a field, and his sheaf arose and stood upright. But our sheaves all bowed down to his!

*(Chorus of disgruntled growling.)*

ASHER: What about the last one? The sun and moon and eleven stars made obeisance to him!

*(Angry murmurs from all.)*

SIMEON: Even Father was shocked at that!

REUBEN *(reasoning)*: Joseph is a dreamer . . . there will always be dreamers. And he is only seventeen . . .

JUDAH: Then what is all this about a Hebrew boy being a man at twelve years of age? *(Derisive)* Perhaps we should give him extra time to grow up! Time to lose the cobwebs from in his head!

SIMEON: Give him nothing! I can't stand the sight of him!

LEVI *(pointing to the Left entrance)*: Too late! Isn't this Joseph heading this way?

*(They all rise to their feet, watching to Left.)*

ASHER: Of course! Who could mistake that coat? *(Anger)* I wonder if he ever takes it off?

SIMEON: I wish he would. I feel like a beggar, in mine!

REUBEN: Father must have sent him to see how we are faring.

LEVI: Well, we were faring quite nicely, until now!

SIMEON *(turning to the others)*: Honestly, haven't we all had enough? Why should we put up with him any longer? Let us slay him and throw him into some pit! *(Looks around.)* There are plenty about, all at least ten feet deep.

*(All look agreeable except JUDAH and REUBEN.)*

REUBEN *(quickly)*: No! He may be a thorn in our sides, but we should not have his blood on our hands!

JUDAH *(agreeing)*: He is still our own flesh. It is better that we do not kill him.

*(Growls of disagreement from the others. REUBEN glances around quickly.)*

REUBEN: There's a pit close by here . . . Perhaps if we just put him into it . . . ?

JUDAH: That would cut him down to size! *(To the others)* Reuben is right! Is it settled, then?

ASHER *(reluctantly)*: Very well. When Joseph arrives, into a pit he goes!

*(Others nod agreement but are not too pleased. REUBEN is scanning the land to Right.)*

JUDAH: What is it, Reuben?

REUBEN: It looks like a caravan heading our way. Probably Ishmaelites from Gilead. They're well off yet, but I'm

going to keep an eye on the sheep. You can't trust these travellers, you know! (*Glances around at brothers*). You can stay and greet Joseph. See you later! (*Picks up his staff and strides offstage to Right.*)

LEVI (*looking now to Left entrance*): And who shall be the first to greet the dreamer?

SIMEON: The first man to embrace him feels the edge of my staff!

LEVI (*growls*): Have your little joke, Simeon!

JOSEPH (*Offstage, calls cheerily*): Hello there!

(*They wait in silence until JOSEPH comes onstage. Some glare at him with open hatred, others with envy at his coat. All except JUDAH, who fingers his beard thoughtfully and hangs back.*)

JOSEPH: Well! Father sent me to enquire how you were getting along! (*Smiles pleasantly around at them all.*) How are you?

SIMEON: None the better now you are here!

JOSEPH (*taken aback*): What's that, Simeon? (*Glances around at their hostile faces.*) What has happened? What's the matter?

LEVI: We have decided we can do without you, Joseph. (*Advances threateningly.*) We don't like you!

SIMEON (*advances also*): And we don't like your coat! (*He wrenches the coat from JOSEPH, who struggles to retain it. They all close in on JOSEPH, except JUDAH.*)

JOSEPH (*shouts*): Let go of me! Give me back my coat! Father gave me that!

SIMEON: And don't we know it! (*Steps back, while LEVI and ASHER hold the struggling JOSEPH.*) My! Without this coat, you look just like one of us! (*He tries it on.*)

JOSEPH (*struggling harder*): Give me that, Simeon! Take it off!

SIMEON (*strutting*): Not on your life! There . . . how do I look? Now I am Jacob's favourite son!

JOSEPH (*fuming*): You wait until Father hears about this!

SIMEON (*sneers*): Goodness me, Joseph! Are you going to tell him? (*To brothers, as he takes off the coat and holds it out.*) Who else would like to try being Father's pet?

LEVI (*fed up*): All right, Simeon, you've had your sport! How much longer have we to hold on to Joseph?

SIMEON: No longer. (*Points to Right.*) Toss him into a pit!

(*All except JUDAH, drag JOSEPH struggling and shouting "No!" offstage to Right. Left alone, JUDAH looks worried. JOSEPH'S shouts subside offstage and the brothers come straggling back, SIMEON holding the coat.*)

ASHER: That should keep Joseph quiet for a while. He might starve, but who cares? Or a wild beast may jump in and tear him to pieces!

LEVI: You just gave me an idea . . .

SIMEON: Listen! We can concentrate on Joseph later. I'm hungry!

(*They settle down, opening up the bundle and pass bread around. JUDAH shakes his head, not taking any. He watches to the Right. Presently SIMEON notices this.*)

SIMEON: So. The caravan is almost here, Judah. But who has money to buy from it? (*Cranes his neck to see.*) Yes . . . Ishmaelites, by their habit. Heading for Egypt.

JUDAH (*thoughtfully*): That's what I was thinking, Simeon. The caravan heading for Egypt, I mean! (*Gestures urgently to draw brothers' attention.*) Listen to me! What profit is there in Joseph's death? None! We'd do better to sell him. After all, we really only want to get rid of him, don't we?

(*Chorus of assent. They look at one another.*)

LEVI (to Simeon): This will bear thinking on.

JUDAH: Then be quick about it, all of you. They are almost here!

SIMEON (amused): I think it's a good idea. (Laughs.) How much shall we ask for the family peacock? Twenty pieces of silver? Twenty-five?

(They begin to smile. SIMEON stands up, holding the coat, and gradually they all rise.)

JUDAH: Joseph might need his coat, Simeon . . .

SIMEON: But it's too good for a slave! I have a better idea for it! (He beckons.) Come here, all of you. How's this?

(He gathers them in close to him including JUDAH, murmurs a moment. They all step back smiling in agreement, except JUDAH.)

LEVI: Well, that's foolproof! Let us lose no time now we have decided!

ASHER: Come on. Let's hoist JOSEPH out of the pit. (Anxiously) Somebody stop the caravan!

(Led by SIMEON they hasten offstage to Right, ignoring JUDAH who hangs back. Onstage, JUDAH paces in agitation. Presently a far-off whistling is heard, grows louder, and then REUBEN comes on from Right entrance. He stops.)

REUBEN: I watched the caravan past the flocks . . . It kept going, so I cut back across the rise. (Looks around.) Where are all the others?

JUDAH (dully): They have gone to slay a young goat.

REUBEN: Oh. (Pause.) Where's the bread? (Kneels to take bread from bundle.) I must take some to Joseph while they're away. I don't suppose they bothered to feed him.

JUDAH (upset): Don't go, Reuben.

REUBEN: What do you mean, "Don't go!" (Alarmed, he rises.) Judah! They haven't—

JUDAH (looks away): No, but they might as well have. (Faces Reuben.) They have sold him to the Ishmaelites.

REUBEN (dropping bread unnoticed): Sold him? And you allowed this?

JUDAH: I'm afraid it was my idea. It was all I could do to save him. No matter what they said, you know it was in their hearts to kill him!

REUBEN (heavily): I know. That's why I suggested the pit. I had hopes of helping him escape if I got a chance. And the beautiful coat he loved . . . Did they sell it, too?

JUDAH (revolted): No. They plan to stain it with the blood of the goat. Then Father will think he was devoured by a wild beast. Poor Father!

REUBEN: Poor Joseph!

JUDAH: Well, at least he has his life, such as it may be from now on.

(They look at one another for a moment, then REUBEN puts an arm around JUDAH's shoulders.)

REUBEN (sadly): His only fault was that Father loved him too much. Judah, I wonder what will become of him, in Egypt?

JUDAH: I don't know. (Firmly) But because of his faith, I know that God will be with Joseph . . . Wherever he goes!

(Sadly they walk to Right Exit and offstage.)

Curtain.

## SCENE II

MANY YEARS LATER. Throne room in Pharaoh's palace. Pharaoh seated on throne (centre back of stage, facing audience. One SLAVE on either side, fanning him slowly with palm frond. Rugs here and there on the floor, six WISE MEN grouped slightly left of throne, looking at Pharaoh.)

PHARAOH: Well, now all my wise men have racked their brains and come forth with nothing, I must rely upon my butler to offer a suggestion! I ought to have the lot of you hanged!

W.M. 1: O Pharaoh, don't upset yourself unduly! When the butler returns with this young man, you may have an interpretation to your dreams!

PHARAOH: *May* have! How can one so young have such a knowledge of dreams? And a prisoner in my gaol, at that?

W.M. 2: But my lord, was it not in the prison that your butler met this Hebrew? And he did say the interpretations given to both himself and your chief baker came true!

PHARAOH (*mollified*): That's right, so he did! Hmmm. Did he say why the young man was imprisoned? For stealing?

W.M. 2: No, my lord. He was a trusted overseer at Potiphar's home, for years.

PHARAOH (*interested*): Potiphar? My captain of the guard?

W.M. 1: Yes, my lord. According to the butler, Potiphar's wife laid charges against him . . .

PHARAOH (*amused*): Which he denies, of course?

W.M. 1: Emphatically. But apparently, Potiphar would not listen to him.

PHARAOH: No. He never would, when it concerned his wife. (*Pause.*) And before that?

W.M. 2: The butler does not know. Only that Potiphar bought him from some Ishmaelites.

PHARAOH: Should he ease my mind about these strange dreams, I shall not care where he came from. I shall reward him!

(*Enter BUTLER from Right with JOSEPH. They halt, and bow to Pharaoh. All heads turn to look at them. PHARAOH beckons them closer.*)

PHARAOH: Come, Butler. Bring him here!

BUTLER: Yes, my lord. (*Leads Joseph before Pharaoh and they stand slightly to right of throne.*)

PHARAOH (*shrewdly*): Hmmm. So this is your youthful prophet?

BUTLER: Yes, my lord.

PHARAOH: And you found him still in the prison?

BUTLER: Yes, but in charge of the other prisoners now, my lord. (*Ashamed*) I had promised to speak for him when I was released, but . . . I forgot.

PHARAOH (*testily*): You forgot! Two years ago! (*Sighing, turns to Joseph.*) And what is your name?

JOSEPH: Joseph, my lord.

PHARAOH: Hmmm. (*Pause.*) Well Joseph, let us see if you can succeed where all the wisdom of my realm has failed me. (*Darts a mean look at his Wise Men, who squirm. He looks back to Joseph and, gesturing, explains*): There I was, standing by a river. And seven fat cows came up, followed by seven thin ones. And the thin cows ate the fat ones. Yet they remained thin!

(*JOSEPH folds his arms and looks thoughtfully at the floor.*)

PHARAOH: Do you follow?

JOSEPH: Yes, my lord.

PHARAOH (*pleased*): And I again slept, and saw seven ears of corn. Good ears, mind you, and all on the one stalk. Then I saw seven dry, poorly-grown ears on a single stalk. And a fierce wind sprang up from the east and blasted them so that they withered even more. (*Pause.*)

(*JOSEPH looks up.*)

PHARAOH: Even so, they devoured the full ears of corn and their appearance was unchanged! (*Sits back.*) I tell you, it has troubled me ever since! (*He waits, watching Joseph.*)

JOSEPH (*thoughtfully*): *I see. (Meets Pharaoh's gaze.)* Seven of everything . . .

PHARAOH: Yes. Well, go ahead, interpret for me!

JOSEPH (*smilingly faintly*): O Pharaoh, it is not in *me!* God will give you an answer. (*Pause, then with appropriate gestures, he explains*): The two dreams are as one. God has shown what He is about to do. The seven fat cows are seven years. The seven good ears of corn are seven years. (*Pause.*) The seven thin cows and the seven empty ears of corn are also seven years. This means there shall come seven years of prosperity and plenty!

(*Everyone looks pleased. PHARAOH leans forward.*)

PHARAOH: Go on, my boy!

JOSEPH: But after that there shall be seven years of famine, and all Egypt will be laid waste!

(*Stir of consternation among all present.*)

JOSEPH: O Pharaoh, the dream came twice so that you would not forget it, for it will soon come true.

PHARAOH: But . . . this is terrible! This means starvation . . . and death! What can be done?

JOSEPH: My lord, you would do well to appoint a reliable man to control the situation as it progresses. He should appoint overseers throughout the land to collect one-fifth of all that is harvested during the seven years of plenty. This should be stored away ready to face the years of famine.

(*Murmurs of approval, nodding of heads, and all looking to Pharaoh. Pharaoh, impressed, is still troubled.*)

PHARAOH: That is all very well. But where do I find such a man blessed with the spirit of God? (*Looks at Butler, who looks meaningfully at Joseph.*) Hmm. It seems to me that God has disclosed all this to you, Joseph, so you are blessed. (*Eyes Joseph carefully, then makes decision.*) I shall set you in control over my house!

JOSEPH: I, my lord?

PHARAOH: Whatever you say will be law to the people. Your authority will be second only to my own. (*Slaps arm of throne emphatically.*)

JOSEPH: Oh. (*Looks at Butler, who smiles.*) Thank you, my lord!

(*PHARAOH rises, tugging a ring from his finger.*)

PHARAOH: Before this company here present, I remove this ring from my own finger and place it upon yours . . . so! (*Takes Joseph's hand and place ring on his finger.*) And this gold chain (*removing chain from neck*) you shall wear about your neck so that all may know the high office you hold! (*Places chain around Joseph's neck.*)

(*JOSEPH bows low, then stands very erect.*)

PHARAOH (*turning to his Wise Men*): And for all the good that *you* were, you can go!

(*WISE MEN exit thankfully to Right. PHARAOH turns to Butler.*)

PHARAOH: You have done me a service, Butler. I am impressed by the sincerity of Joseph. I feel that what he has said is the truth.

BUTLER (*gratified*): Yes, my lord!

PHARAOH (*kindly*): You may go, now. I would speak with him alone.

BUTLER: Yes, O Pharaoh. (*Bows low, moving backwards to Right exit and out.*)

PHARAOH (*seating himself again*): How old are you, my boy?

JOSEPH: I am thirty years of age now, my lord.

PHARAOH: Hmm. Well Joseph, at thirty, you shall be one of the youngest governors my country has ever had! (*Rubs chin thoughtfully.*) You are not married?

JOSEPH: No, my lord.

PHARAOH: Ah. (*Sits back.*) A governor should have a wife, and take up residence here in Memphis. (*Rises, looking pleased.*) My priest has a daughter of whom I am very fond (*comes closer to Joseph*). A sweet girl, gentle of nature, and with lovely eyes. Her name is . . . Asenath. (*Takes Joseph by the arm.*) It is my wish that you should meet her, Joseph!

JOSEPH: Yes, my lord!

(*PHARAOH leads Joseph away to Right exit, smiling, and SLAVES stop fanning. Exit Pharaoh with Joseph.*)

*Curtain.*

### SCENE III

EIGHT YEARS LATER. *Room in Governor's residence. An ornate chair, against far left wall, with rug before it, and a lounge settee against centre wall facing audience. A small table centre stage with a bowl of flowers on it. ASENATH is arranging the flowers. Enter JOSEPH from Left, in travelling cloak.*

JOSEPH: Asenath!

ASENATH (*turning in surprise*): Joseph! I didn't know you were home! (*Hastens to embrace him.*) Oh, we have missed you!

JOSEPH: And how I have missed you! (*Drops a kiss on top of her hair.*) Where are my sons?

ASENATH: Both having a sleep! (*Looks up at him.*) Will you have to be away from us much more, Joseph?

(*He releases her and leads her to the lounge, sits down draws her down beside him.*)

JOSEPH: I hope not, my love. But the famine is fierce, and I must see that my overseers distribute the grain fairly.

ASENATH (*proudly*): If it had not been for your far-sightedness, Egypt would be starving, now.

JOSEPH: Well, I had seven years in which to build storehouses all over the country. Now the store must tide us over the famine. (*Takes her hands.*) It is dreadful, Asenath. Whole farmlands laid waste . . . everything dried up . . .

ASENATH: I am glad I don't have to look upon the sights you see. But our people are not afraid. They have faith in your leadership.

JOSEPH: Their faith must be in God who guides me. (*Pause.*) The plan is working well. We have enough surplus to sell to other countries, as I hoped.

ASENATH: I remember you saying the famine would not stop at our borders. And you organised the years of plenty so that we might help others!

JOSEPH: That is what God would want us to do.

ASENATH: While you were away, some men came here to ask about grain.

JOSEPH: Tiras would have taken care of them.

ASENATH: Yes. He is a good man, Joseph.

JOSEPH: And he is a good friend. (*Soberly*) He is a Hebrew, also.

ASENATH: You never speak of your homeland, Joseph.

JOSEPH (*standing up, still holding one of her hands*): I think of it, sometimes. (*Looks about him.*) But this is my home, now. (*Gazes down at her.*) Asenath, God directed my life that I was brought here. I knew, even in that first bitterness, that He had some purpose for me. And that some day life would be sweeter. (*Smiles tenderly.*) And it is! I called our younger son Ephraim, because God made me prosperous in the land of my bondage.

(*ASENATH rises and is about to embrace him, when there is a knock. They turn to look—to Right entrance.*)

JOSEPH (*pleased*): Tiras! Come in!

(Enter TIRAS. JOSEPH goes to meet him, slaps him on the shoulder.)

TIRAS: Welcome home, Joseph!

JOSEPH: Thank you! I believe they kept you busy while I was away?

TIRAS: Every day! More people coming in, telling of hardship and hunger . . .

ASENATH (*interrupts*): I'll go and see if the children are awake yet!

JOSEPH (*turning with a smile*): All right, Asenath!

(Exit ASENATH to Left. JOSEPH turns back to Tiras.)

TIRAS: Even now, I have men who have come from as far as Caanan to buy corn. Ten brothers, if you please!

JOSEPH: Oh?

TIRAS: I asked them to wait in the next room. Will you see them, or shall I?

JOSEPH: You can Tiras. I am tired from my trip.

TIRAS: All right.

(Exit TIRAS to Right. JOSEPH stands fingering his chin for a moment.)

JOSEPH: All the way from Caanan, eh? (*He walks almost to Right exit, looks out. Face registers shock. He retreats further back onstage.*) Oh, surely not! (*Looks back to Right again.*) But . . . (*He steps closer to exit, looking out.*) Judah . . . Simeon . . . Reuben . . . Levi . . . All of them except Benjamin! (*Turns away, stunned.*) All a little older, but I'd know them anywhere! (*He walks a few paces to Left, stops.*) It's not possible they would know me, not *here!* (*Pauses to think for a moment, then faces to Right exit and calls*): Tiras!

(Enter TIRAS. JOSEPH beckons him closer.)

TIRAS: What is it, Joseph?

JOSEPH: I . . . have changed my mind. I will see the men from Caanan. But I want you to act as interpreter for me, Tiras. Speak to the men in Hebrew, and do not call me by name within their hearing.

TIRAS: But . . . when we first met, Potiphar told me you were from the land of the Hebrews, too!. Surely . . . ?

JOSEPH (*guarded*): A . . . man may confuse his native tongue after so many years. I would prefer you to address them for me.

TIRAS: Well . . . of course. What would you have me say?

JOSEPH: That I accuse them of being spies come to learn the situation here in Egypt.

TIRAS: But Joseph! (*Looks to Right entrance and back to Joseph.*) They don't look like spies!

JOSEPH (*wags admonishing forefinger*): Spies never do! (*Takes off his cloak, gives it to Tiras.*)

TIRAS: I suppose you're right. (*Turning to go*) I'll have them come in. (*Exit to Right.*)

(JOSEPH walks to the chair, seats himself. Enter TIRAS, without the cloak, followed by the Ten Brothers. They bow low to Joseph, then straighten up and wait.)

TIRAS (*to Brothers*): I interpret for the Governor. He questions your presence in Egypt.

REUBEN: But sir, we told you! We have come to buy corn!

TIRAS: You have come from Caanan. The Governor feels you may be spies.

(Buzz of protest from Brothers.)

REUBEN: Tell my lord we came only to buy food. Our father is old. We are here for his sake and for our little ones.

(TIRAS goes to Joseph, murmurs in his ear. JOSEPH replies inaudibly and TIRAS goes back to the Brothers.)

TIRAS: I regret to say the Governor does not believe you.  
He says again, you are spies!

(Chorus of protest.)

REUBEN: Sir, we are twelve brothers, the sons of one man  
in the land of Caanan.

TIRAS (grimly): I counted ten of you as you came in!

REUBEN: The youngest is still with our father, and the other  
one (glances at brothers and they avoid his gaze). The  
other one (falters as he looks back to Tiras) is not here.

(Looks down at floor.)

TIRAS: Very well. I'll tell the Governor who you claim to  
be.

(TIRAS strides back to Joseph, converses in low tone,  
then turns to Brothers without leaving Joseph.)

TIRAS: Very well. My lord has decided that if you wish to  
prove yourselves innocent of his charges, you shall not go  
home unless your youngest brother is brought here. One  
of you must go to fetch him. Until then, the rest remain  
here, in prison!

(Brothers turn to one another, muttering in consternation.  
Judah speaks out.)

JUDAH: There, my brothers! You heard what the interpreter  
said! See what a plight we are in? And is this not a  
judgment from God? It is for what we did to our other  
brother long ago!

(Brothers stare at Judah. REUBEN nods agreement.)

REUBEN: Judah is right. And did I not say to all of you  
then, that we should not harm him? He was only seven-  
teen . . . This is indeed a judgment upon us!

SIMEON (impatiently): Oh, listen, Reuben . . .

REUBEN: No. You listen, Simeon! You were always hard  
and cruel. (To Levy): And you, too, Levi!

SIMEON: Well, you and Judah stopped us from killing him,  
so we didn't do as much as we might have. Why should  
the punishment be so severe? And why must it fall upon  
all of us?

REUBEN (to Simeon): Do you question even the judgment  
of God?

(JOSEPH gestures quickly and TIRAS herds them out Right  
exit. Left alone, Joseph is overcome.)

JOSEPH: Oh God, that I should have overheard all of this!  
I can't bear any more! (Buries his face in his hands.)

Curtain.

#### SCENE IV

MANY MONTHS LATER. Same room in Governor's resi-  
dence, without table and flower bowl. TIRAS is studying a  
scroll map. Enter ASENATH from Left. TIRAS looks up.)

ASENATH: I have been looking for you, Tiras!

TIRAS: I'm sorry, my lady. I didn't know! (Moves toward  
her.) I've been studying a map of the areas affected by  
the famine. (Starts to roll up the scroll.)

ASENATH (urgently): Joseph will be home soon for his mid-  
day meal. I received your message, and have made  
arrangements for extra places at the table.

TIRAS: Thank you, my lady. It was really Joseph's message,  
of course!

ASENATH: Yes. That's why I wanted to talk to you. (Seat-  
ing herself on lounge.) I am intrigued by the background  
of these men from Caanan. Joseph says very little, and his  
actions bewilder me.

TIRAS: You are not the only one bewildered, my lady!  
(Stands scroll against the wall.)

ASENATH: Tell me what you know of them, Tiras.

TIRAS: Well . . . you knew Joseph put them all in prison until one should elect to go home and fetch the youngest brother?

ASENATH: Yes, and none of them would go!

TIRAS: That's right. But after three days he decided they should take the grain they wanted and go.

ASENATH: How strange!

TIRAS: I thought so, but Joseph said, "It was not for them, but for their father; they said he was very old!"

ASENATH: I see. Joseph is a very compassionate man . . .

TIRAS: But he held hostage the one called Simeon. *He* was not to be released until the brothers returned with the young Benjamin.

ASENATH: And they have been all this time coming back with him?

TIRAS (*nodding*): Apparently their father objected. But when all their grain was used, he had no choice. This morning I told Joseph they had arrived with Benjamin. He has ordered the release of Simeon, and now they are all to dine with him.

ASENATH: I don't understand why.

TIRAS: Nor do I, my lady. Nor do they. In fact, they are more worried about this invitation than we are!

ASENATH: Really?

TIRAS (*explains with gestures*): When he sent them home last time, Joseph instructed us that each man's money be secretly placed in his sack!

ASENATH: You mean, he really made a gift of the grain?

TIRAS (*shrugs*): It appears so. But when *they* discovered the money, they were afraid. And they brought it all the way back with them.

ASENATH: No doubt they fear it was treachery of some kind, designed to deliver them into Egyptian hands!

TIRAS: One could hardly blame them. They had been accused of spying, remember!

ASENATH (*thoughtfully*): Yes. They had. (*Pause.*) And now?

TIRAS (*shrugs*): Who knows?

ASENATH (*troubled, looking down at her hands*): Only Joseph, I suppose.

(*Footsteps heard offstage to Left. ASENATH looks up.*)

ASENATH: This sounds like him, now.

(*Enter JOSEPH from Left. ASENATH rises, goes to him and he puts an arm around her.*)

JOSEPH (*looking from one to the other*): Well!

ASENATH: Must you always come in the back way, Joseph dear?

JOSEPH (*with a smile at Tiras*): I think we have visitors waiting in the front hall!

TIRAS: Yes, they are here. Their feet are bathed, their asses fed, and they have brought gifts for you!

(*JOSEPH looks down as Asenath, then back to Tiras.*)

JOSEPH: I will receive them in here, and then we shall dine. (*Looks at Asenath.*) That is, when the meal is ready.

ASENATH: I had the front banquet room prepared, Joseph. I'll go and see that all is as you'd like it.

JOSEPH: Thank you. (*He nods, gives her a little smile.*)

(*Exit ASENATH to Right. Left alone with Tiras, JOSEPH paces thoughtfully to and fro, then stops.*)

JOSEPH: Tiras, you will pretend to interpret for me, as before?

TIRAS: Yes.

JOSEPH: And remember not to call me Joseph within their hearing.

TIRAS: Of course. (*Hesitates, then comes closer to Joseph.*)  
We have been friends for many years, haven't we? Surely you can tell me!

JOSEPH: Tell you what?

TIRAS (*gestures, at a loss*): What this is all about. You're being so mysterious it worries your wife!

JOSEPH: Asenath? How?

TIRAS: Well, all these men coming to the house... You obviously don't trust them, yet you are so very generous!

JOSEPH: Oh. (*Pause.*) I will speak with Asenath later. (*Small smile.*) And you, my friend, bear with me a little longer!

TIRAS: Very well.

(*JOSEPH seats himself on the ornate chair, and gestures.*)

JOSEPH: Bring them in, now!

(*TIRAS nods, goes offstage to Right. JOSEPH looks pensively down at his hands, only looking up as TIRAS re-enters.*)

TIRAS: My lord, the brothers from Canaan!

(*TIRAS beckons and eleven brothers come on from Right, JUDAH, REUBEN and BENJAMIN to the fore. All bow low to Joseph then straighten up and wait. TIRAS crosses to Joseph, they converse quietly, then TIRAS addresses the brothers.*)

TIRAS: The Governor asks after your father. Is he well?

(*Chorus of assent from all except Simeon.*)

TIRAS (*indicating Benjamin*): And this one who was not with you before... he asks is this the youngest brother?

(*Chorus of assent from all. JOSEPH beckons Benjamin to come closer. BENJAMIN approaches cautiously, halts a few paces from Joseph. JOSEPH rises, to gaze for a long moment into his face, then turns abruptly and quickly leaves the room by Left exit. Brothers look at one another. Mystified, BENJAMIN looks to Tiras, who signals him to rejoin his brothers.*)

BENJAMIN (*to Tiras*): Sir, what is it? Why did he look at me, like that?

REUBEN (*to Tiras*): Yes, have we offended my lord in some way?

JUDAH (*interjecting*): Everything should be all right now; we have done all that the Governor asked!

(*Chorus of agreement.*)

TIRAS: Then perhaps you will await his pleasure to dine?

(*They nod their agreement, still puzzled, and wait. Enter JOSEPH from Left. He is composed now, and TIRAS crosses quickly to him. They converse quietly, then TIRAS addresses brothers.*)

TIRAS: We shall eat at the Governor's table in the front banquet room.

(*JOSEPH proceeds to cross stage and goes off Right. All bow low as he passes. Then at a signal from Tiras, they start to follow him off.*)

*Curtain.*

## SCENE V

**NEXT DAY.** *Same room at Governor's residence. JOSEPH enters from Left, looks around.*

JOSEPH (*calling*): Tiras!

(*Enter TIRAS from Right.*)

JOSEPH: Tiras, did the Canaanites get away all right this morning?

TIRAS: Yes. They were still talking about the wonderful meal you put on for them yesterday!

JOSEPH: And my instructions?

TIRAS: Carried out to the letter. Each man's money placed in his sack as before, and your silver drinking cup . . . Joseph . . . (*Crosses to Joseph.*) This is a deep game you're playing!

JOSEPH: Deep? Hmmm. We shall see. (*Turns and paces away a few steps.*) The servants have had time to overtake them and . . . (*Stops and looks at Tiras.*)

TIRAS: And when your silver cup is found in the sack of the youngest, what then, Joseph?

JOSEPH: Then, Tiras, my servants shall bring them all back. They should be here any time now.

TIRAS: Why did you send some other interpreter instead of me?

JOSEPH (*amused*): Because you do not like this "deep game" I am playing. I thought you might not want to . . . play!

TIRAS: As chief steward of your house I do not question the Governor. But as your old friend Tiras, I fear for you, Joseph.

JOSEPH: Then fear no more, Tiras. When they return, you may interpret for me again, if you wish. (*Pensive*) They should be back any time now . . .

TIRAS: Unless there has been trouble. Did you think of that?

JOSEPH: I thought of it. But while they are still within my borders, they'll think twice . . .

(*Noise of many feet offstage to Right.*)

TIRAS (*grimly*): Well, here they are.

JOSEPH: Have them brought in, Tiras.

(*Exit TIRAS to Right. JOSEPH seats himself on chair. Eleven brothers are brought on from Right by TIRAS. TIRAS has the Silver Cup. TWO SERVANTS, holding Benjamin by the arms, come to the fore. At a nod from JOSEPH, the Servants release Benjamin. All bow low to Joseph, and TIRAS takes the Silver Cup to him. JOSEPH murmurs to Tiras then TIRAS returns to brothers.*)

JUDAH (*to Tiras*): After this, how can we ever clear ourselves?

REUBEN (*to Tiras*): Sir, you must speak to the Governor for us! None of us knew about his drinking cup!

TIRAS: I shouldn't worry if I were you. As you see, he is quite happy now he has it again. He does not want all of you . . . only the one in whose sack it was found.

(*Brothers look at Benjamin.*)

REUBEN: Poor Benjamin! He knew no more about it than we knew of this second lot of money!

BENJAMIN (*to Tiras*): Sir, I swear, upon my honour . . .

SIMEON (*fuming*): Of course it is a trick! But what can we do?

REUBEN (*to Simeon*): Quiet, Simeon!

TIRAS: The Governor says the rest of you may go in peace to your father.

(*Murmurs of dissent from brothers. REUBEN places an arm around Benjamin.*)

REUBEN (*to Tiras*): Sir, ask my lord not to be angered at my saying this, but Benjamin is all that our father has left of his mother Rachel. He will die if he loses him! Ask the Governor if he will accept me as his slave instead . . . for how can I face my father without Benjamin, anyway?

TIRAS: I will convey your request to the Governor.

JOSEPH (*rising*): There is no need, Tiras!

*(Brothers look sharply to one another. TIRAS watches Joseph, and waits.)*

REUBEN *(to Tiras)*: The Governor speaks Hebrew?

ASHER: He understands our language!

LEVI: He has known every word we said!

JUDAH *(reflectively)*: All the time!

JOSEPH: You may leave us, Tiras.

TIRAS: Yes, my lord. *(Bows, and backs out Right exit.)*

*(JOSEPH confronts his brothers. They are afraid.)*

JOSEPH: You are right, Reuben! I speak Hebrew because I was born a Hebrew! *(Takes a step nearer them and stops.)* I am one of twelve brothers, and my father's name is Jacob. *(Looks at Simeon.)* I am your brother Joseph whom you sold into slavery!

*(Nobody moves. Stricken, they stare at Joseph.)*

JOSEPH *(gestures)*: Don't you see my likeness to Benjamin?

*(They dart furtive glances at Benjamin and back to Joseph.)*

JOSEPH: *Of course you do!* *(Pauses, then appealing)* Don't be afraid . . . come nearer!

*(Nobody moves.)*

JOSEPH *(taking another step forward)*: Don't be angry with yourselves, for God sent me before you to preserve life! It was not you who sent me here, but God!

*(They exchange glances but still nobody moves.)*

JOSEPH: For two years there has been widespread famine. And there will be five more! But I was here to prepare for it. This is why the people still have food. It is why you are all alive today. *(Looks at Benjamin, then with affection holds out his arms.)* Benjamin . . . come to me!

*(BENJAMIN advances hopefully.)*

BENJAMIN: Joseph? But they told us, Father and I . . . that he . . . that you . . . Oh, Joseph! *(Embraces Joseph who holds him tightly.)*

REUBEN *(to Judah)*: It is Joseph! *(Smile breaking out.)*

JUDAH: Thank God!

SIMEON *(aghast)*: It is! *(In wonder)* And he forgives us! *(Brothers look at one another, smiling.)*

JOSEPH *(holding Benjamin off to look at him)*: Now tell me truly. How is my father?

BENJAMIN: He is well. He still speaks of you, Joseph!

JOSEPH: Good! Now listen carefully. I want you to go to him and say, "God has made your son Joseph lord of all Egypt and second only to Pharaoh! You are to come down to Egypt without delay!"

BENJAMIN: He isn't going to believe it, you know!

JOSEPH: You must convince him. And I will send presents to him. *(Placing one arm around Benjamin, Joseph turns to the others)*: Take your waggons and bring back your families! Bring your flocks and herds! You shall live in the land of Goshen, where I can care for you!

*(Still holding Benjamin, Joseph moves to Judah and Reuben, gripping each in turn on the shoulder with his free hand.)*

REUBEN: I marvel at all this, Joseph. I can hardly believe it, even now!

JOSEPH: Marvel then at the works of God, and believe in His divine guidance. *(To all)*: After more than twenty years, our family is united again!

*(Brothers crowd forward smiling, all eager to touch Joseph.)*

*Curtain.*

## PROPERTIES:

For Scene I, backdrop of grassy hills  
with light shrubbery.

10 crooks or staves.

3 waterskins, full.

Large bundle of bread pieces tied up  
in cloth.

Several rolled up cloaks.

\*

2 palm fronds.

Pharaoh's Throne.

Various floor rugs.

Ornate Governor's chair.

Lounge settee.

Small table.

Bowl of flowers.

Large scroll map.

Silver drinking cup.