

The Chaste Adventures Of Joseph

BY FLOYD DELL

A COMEDY

"The Chaste Adventures of Joseph" was first produced at the Liberal Club, New York City, in 1914, with the following cast:

Madam Potiphar Louise Murphy

Asenath Marjorie Jones

Potiphar Berkeley Tobey

Joseph Floyd Dell

Slave Maurice Becker

A room in Potiphar's house. It is sparingly furnished with a table, two stools, and a couch, all in the simpler style of the early dynasties.... The table, which is set at an angle, is piled with papyri, and one papyrus is half-unrolled and held open by paper-weights where somebody has been reading it.... There is a small window in one wall, opening on the pomegranate garden. At the back, between two heavy pillars, is a doorway.... Two women are heard to pass, laughing and talking, through the corridor outside, and pause at the doorway. One of them looks in curiously.

THE LADY. Such a lovely house, Madam Potiphar!--But what is this quiet room? Your husband's study?

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*coming in*) Oh, this is nothing--merely the room of one of the slaves. Come, dear Cousin Asenath, and I will show you the garden. The pomegranates are just beginning to blossom.

ASENATH. The room of a slave? Indeed! He seems to be an educated person!

MADAM POTIPHAR. Educated? Oh, yes--he is a sort of book-keeper for Potiphar. At least, that is what he is supposed to be. But he is never on hand when he is wanted. If he were here, we might get him to show us through the vineyard.

ASENATH. Why not send for him? I would love to see the vineyard before your husband takes me out in the chariot.

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*ironically*) Send for Joseph? It would be useless. Joseph has affairs of his own on hand, always.

ASENATH. (*startled*) Joseph! Is that his name?

MADAM POTIPHAR. Yes--"Joseph." An ugly, foreign-sounding name, don't you think?

ASENATH. It is rather an odd name--but I've heard it before. It was the name of a youth who used to be one of my father's slaves in Heliopolis.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Heliopolis? I wonder--what was he like?

ASENATH. Oh, he was a pretty boy, with nice manners.

MADAM POTIPHAR. I thought for a moment it might be the same one. But this Joseph is an ill-favoured creature--and insolent. . . . What colour was his hair?

ASENATH. I really don't remember. It's been a year since he was there.... You have a *lovely* house, my dear. I'm *so* glad I came to see you!

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*also willing to change the subject*) It's nice to see you again, dear Asenath. We haven't seen each other since we were little girls. Do you remember how we played together in the date-orchard? And the long, long talks we had?

ASENATH. Don't let's be sentimental about our childhood! MADAM POTIPHAR. Do you remember how we talked about being married? (*Asenath goes to the little window.*) We hated all men, as I remember.

ASENATH. I was eight years old then. . . . Who is that handsome young man I see out there?

MADAM POTIPHAR. In the garden?

ASENATH. Yes.

Madam Potiphar comes to the window.

MADAM POTIPHAR. That--that is the slave we were speaking of. . .

ASENATH. Joseph? . . . I wonder if it *is* the same one? . . .

MADAM POTIPHAR. Well--and what if it were?

ASENATH. He was really a very interesting young man. . . .

MADAM POTIPHAR. If you are so anxious to find out, why don't you go and talk to him?

ASENATH. (*coolly*) I think I shall.

She starts toward the door.

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*shocked*) Asenath! You, a daughter of the High Priest of Heliopolis--

ASENATH. As such, I am quite accustomed to doing as I please.

She goes out.

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*looking amusedly after her*) Silly little thing! (*She stands there thinking.*) There's no doubt of it! Joseph did come from Heliopolis last year. But what have I to be afraid of? (*She sees a pair of sandals on the floor by the table. She picks one of them up, and kisses it passionately, whispering*)--Joseph!

Enter Potiphar. Madam Potiphar puts the sandal behind her back.

POTIPHAR. (*a dull, dignified gentleman*) Oh, here's where you are! I was looking everywhere for you. But where's your cousin?

MADAM POTIPHAR. She will be back in a moment. I brought her here to show her the educated slave of whom you are so proud, at work. But he is away somewhere, as usual.

POTIPHAR. (*defensively*) He has other duties.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Oh, yes, no doubt!

POTIPHAR. What's the matter now?

MADAM POTIPHAR. Nothing new. You know what I think about this Joseph of yours.

POTIPHAR. (*irritated*) Now, if you are going to bring that subject up again--! Well, I tell you flatly, I won't do it.

MADAM POTIPHAR. You'd better take my advice!

POTIPHAR. It's the most unreasonable thing I ever heard of! For the first time in my life I get an efficient secretary--and you want me to get rid of him. It's ridiculous. What have you against Joseph, anyway?

MADAM POTIPHAR. I--I don't think he's honest.

POTIPHAR. Honest! Who expects the secretary of a government official to be honest? I don't want an honest man in charge of my affairs--all I want is a capable one. Besides, how would I know whether he is honest or not? I can't bother to go over his accounts, and I couldn't understand them if I did. Mathematics, my dear, is not an art that high-class Egyptians excel in. It takes slaves and Hebrews for that.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Well, just because he is able to add up a row of figures is no reason why he should be so high-handed with everybody. One would think he was the master here, instead of a slave.

POTIPHAR. A private secretary, my dear, is different from an ordinary slave. You mustn't expect him to behave like a doorkeeper. I

remember now, he complained that you kept wanting him to run errands for you.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Yes, and he refused--in the most insolent manner. He is a proud and scheming man, I tell you. I am sure he is plotting some villainy against you.

POTIPHAR. (*wearily*) Yes, you have said that before.

MADAM POTIPHAR. I say it again. Joseph is a scoundrel.

POTIPHAR. You'll have to do more than say it, my dear. What proof have you of his villainy?

MADAM POTIPHAR. I think you might trust to my womanly intuition.

POTIPHAR. Bah! Joseph is going to stay! Do you understand?

He pounds on the table for emphasis. Madam Potiphar takes advantage of the occasion to drop the sandal unnoticed.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Well, you needn't create a domestic scene. Asenath may return at any moment.

POTIPHAR. (*gloomily*) I believe I'm to take her out in the chariot.

MADAM POTIPHAR. You don't begrudge my guest that much of your attention, do you? You know I cannot bear to ride behind those wild horses of yours. And she said she wanted to see the city.

POTIPHAR. Oh--I'll go. But I must see to my chariot. (*He claps his hands. A servant appears, and bows deeply.*) Send Joseph here at once.

With another deep bow, the slave disappears. A pause.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Now you know what it is to have your slave off attending to some business of his own when you want him.

POTIPHAR. (*annoyed*) Where can he be?

Enter Joseph.

JOSEPH. (*ignoring Madam Potiphar, and making a slight bow to Potiphar*) Here I am, sir.

POTIPHAR. (*after a triumphant glance at his wife*) Have my chariot made ready for me, will you?

JOSEPH. It will give me great pleasure to do so, sir.

He bows slightly, and goes out.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Did you notice his insolence?

POTIPHAR. There you go again! He said he was glad to do it for me. What more do you want?

MADAM POTIPHAR. You are the stupidest man in Egypt.

POTIPHAR. Thank you, my dear.

Joseph returns.

POTIPHAR. Is the chariot ready so soon, Joseph?

JOSEPH. The chariot is quite ready.

POTIPHAR. Very well. (*A pause*) And are those accounts finished yet, Joseph?

JOSEPH. The accounts are quite finished. And I would like to suggest, if I may--

He is interrupted by the re-entrance of Asenath.

ASENATH. What a lovely garden you have!

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*significantly*) Yes!

ASENATH. The pomegranate blossoms are so beautiful!

MADAM POTIPHAR. You could hardly tear yourself away, could you?

POTIPHAR. (*with a patient smile*) And are you ready for your chariot ride now?

ASENATH. Oh, yes! I am so eager to see the city! But I fear my hair needs a touch or two, first. . . .

MADAM POTIPHAR. It is so hard to keep one's hair in order when one walks in the garden. I will take you to my room, dear Asenath. (*To Potiphar*) We shall be ready presently.

POTIPHAR. The horses are waiting!

ASENATH. It won't take me but a moment!

MADAM POTIPHAR. Come, my dear. (*They go toward the door.*) I am so glad you liked our garden--

They go out.

POTIPHAR. (*turning to Joseph*) What were you going to say, Joseph?

JOSEPH. You asked me about my accounts. I was about to suggest that I show them to you tonight, when you return from your ride.

POTIPHAR. (*alarmed*) No! No! I don't want to see them. . . . I just want to know that everything is getting on well.

JOSEPH. Everything is getting along quite well.

POTIPHAR. Very good. I have complete confidence in you. . . . Joseph-- you have a mathematical mind; how long would you say it would take a woman to do her hair?

JOSEPH. Not less than half an hour, sir--especially if she has something to talk about with another woman while she is doing it.

POTIPHAR. (*surprised*) What should *they* have to talk about?

JOSEPH. Secrets.

POTIPHAR. Secrets?

JOSEPH. What things are women especially interested in, sir?

POTIPHAR. Dress, perhaps?

JOSEPH. Perhaps.

POTIPHAR. Housekeeping?

JOSEPH. I doubt it, sir.

POTIPHAR. Joseph, you perturb me. Besides food and dress, there is only one subject, so far as I am aware, of interest to women. I hope you do not imply--

JOSEPH. Far be it from me, sir, to indulge in implications, with respect to an honoured guest, in the household in which I am a slave.

POTIPHAR. Still--it is hard to tell, sometimes. Women are mysterious creatures. What do *you* think of them, Joseph?

JOSEPH. I try not to, sir.

POTIPHAR. You are a wise man. Yes, I suppose you have your difficulties, too. The morality of the slave-girls is not all it should be. But if you will believe me, the morality of our women, too--

JOSEPH. Ah, sir!

POTIPHAR. Yes, Joseph, it leaves something to be desired. If you knew the advances that have been made to me by certain great ladies--

JOSEPH. If you will permit me to say so, sir, you have my sympathy.

POTIPHAR. Joseph--women are the very devil, aren't they?

JOSEPH. They are a great trial, sir. One must learn the secret of dealing with them.

POTIPHAR. Do *you* know that secret?

JOSEPH. I do, sir.

POTIPHAR. I am inclined to believe that you really do. You are a remarkable man. But then, you have a naturally cold disposition. It must come easy to you.

JOSEPH. Not so easy as you may think, sir. Temperamentally, I am very susceptible to the charms of women.

POTIPHAR. Then you are more remarkable even than I thought. Come, what *is* your secret?

JOSEPH. It is not the sort of secret that one gives away for nothing, sir.

POTIPHAR. I am sorry to see you display such a mercenary disposition, Joseph. But I see that I must come to terms with you. How much will you take to teach me your secret?

JOSEPH. This time, sir, I will not be mercenary. I will make you a sporting proposition.

POTIPHAR. (*very much interested*) Good! What is it?

JOSEPH. I will toss up a coin, and let you call it. If you win, I will teach you the secret for nothing. And if you lose--

POTIPHAR. And if I lose, you keep your secret--

JOSEPH. Not merely that. If you lose, you will give me my freedom.

POTIPHAR. But I cannot get along without you, Joseph!

JOSEPH. I will continue to work for you on a salary basis.

POTIPHAR. Done! Where is your coin?

Joseph takes a small coin from his wallet, flips it in the air, and covers it with his hand when it falls on the table. He looks up at Potiphar.

POTIPHAR. Much depends on this. What shall I say?

JOSEPH. I know what you will say, sir.

POTIPHAR. Impossible! Tails.

Joseph uncovers the coin. Potiphar bends over it.

JOSEPH. *(without looking)* It is heads.

POTIPHAR. So it is! I lose--Joseph, you are a lucky man!

JOSEPH. Not at all, sir--a clever one. You see, I knew just how the coin would fall. I tossed it so that it would fall that way.

POTIPHAR. But--how did you know what I was going to say?

JOSEPH. I will explain to you. On one side of the coin is a representation of the present Pharaoh, who has denied you advancement because of his daughter's interest in you. In consequence, you dislike any reminder of him--even on a coin. But on the other side is a representation of the goddess Isis; she is your favourite goddess--and moreover, you yourself have been heard to remark that her face and figure resemble remarkably that of a certain great lady, whose name--is never mentioned when the story is told. Naturally I knew how you would call the coin.

POTIPHAR. *(trembling with rage)* How dare you say such things! Do you forget that I can have you beaten with rods?

JOSEPH. (*calmly*) Do you forget, sir, that I am no longer a slave? Free men are not beaten in Egypt.

POTIPHAR. Free?

JOSEPH. Unless Potiphar takes back his word. It is true that I have no witnesses to it.

POTIPHAR. (*with great dignity*) Witnesses are unnecessary. I had forgotten for the moment. Let this remind me. (*He gives Joseph a ring.*) You are a free man. And so--what I thought was an insolence is merely a pleasantry. But--you take a quick advantage of your freedom.

JOSEPH. I accept the rebuke.

POTIPHAR. And--free man or slave--Joseph, you know too much!

Potiphar walks out of the room. . . . Joseph seats himself at the table, and takes up a scroll of papyrus. He reads a moment, then claps his hands. A slave enters, stands before the table, and bows.

JOSEPH. (*consulting the papyrus*) Bear word to the overseer of the winepress that the grapes in the southeast section will be brought in for pressing tomorrow morning. . . . Bear word to the chief carpenter that a table and two couches, of the standard pattern, are wanted--at once. . . . Bear word to the chief pastry-cook that his request for another helper is denied.

Joseph makes a gesture of dismissal, and the slave, with a bow, goes out. Joseph rises, and walking around the table, holds up 'his hand to look at his ring.

JOSEPH. Freedom!

Madam Potiphar strolls in.

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*familiarly*) They have gone. . . .

Joseph picks up a scroll from the table.

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*sharply*) Joseph!

JOSEPH. (*respectfully*) Yes, madam.

MADAM POTIPHAR. I understood you to say a while ago that your work was quite finished?

JOSEPH. Yes, madam.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Then you have plenty of time now....

JOSEPH. Yes, plenty of time for more work.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Well, you need not begin immediately. *I* want a little of your time just now.

JOSEPH. If it is an errand, I will call one of the slaves.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Do you mean--one of the other slaves?

JOSEPH. I, madam, am no longer a slave.

He holds up his hand, and looks at the ring.

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*incredulous*) How did this happen? Did you *buy* your freedom, perchance?

JOSEPH. No. Your husband gave it to me a moment ago.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Gave it to you? You mean that you swindled him out of it in some way!

JOSEPH. As you please, madam.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Well, it is his own affair if he wishes to give away such valuable property. Only--it is difficult to adjust oneself to a change like that.

JOSEPH. Do not, I pray, let the change disturb you.

MADAM POTIPHAR. No, I insist. It is both a duty and a pleasure. Since you are now a free man, Joseph, I propose that we treat each other as equals and friends.

JOSEPH. That will be very considerate of us both.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Sir, you are insolent. No, no--I mean, my friend, you are very rude.

JOSEPH. Thank you for making the distinction. And now, since we are to treat each other as equals and friends, I beg you--(*he takes some small objects from his wallet and holds them out in his hand*)--to take these hairpins, which are the mementos of your various visits to my room. As a slave, no suspicion, of course, could attach to me in connection with a lady of your rank. But as equals and friends, we both have our reputations to preserve.

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*taking them*) Thank you. (*She restores them to her hair.*) I lose them everywhere I go. They fall out every time I speak. They mean nothing whatever.

JOSEPH. It is unnecessary to explain that to me. I am perfectly aware of the fact.

MADAM POTIPHAR. You are perfectly aware of everything, aren't you, Joseph?

JOSEPH. Everything that it is to my interest to be aware of, madam.

MADAM POTIPHAR. No--there is one thing you don't know, and I am going to tell you.

JOSEPH. Proceed, madam.

He takes the coin from the table.

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*coming close to him and looking boldly into his eyes*) Can't you guess?

At this moment Joseph drops the coin from his hand, and it rolls away. Joseph starts, looks after it, and goes across the room to pick it up.

JOSEPH. One must take care of the small coins!

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*angrily*) Oh!

She flings off to the window, Joseph returns and seats himself on the little stool at the nearer end of the table, with a papyrus in front of him. He reads it in silence. Madam Potiphar comes and seats herself on the table, and looks down at him. He continues to study the papyrus. She leans over to see what he is doing, and then, as he pays no attention, she turns so that she is reclining prone along its length, facing him, her chin in her hands, one foot idly waving in the air.

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*gently*) Am I bothering you?

JOSEPH. Not at all.

MADAM POTIPHAR. I like to watch you work.

JOSEPH. I don't mind.

MADAM POTIPHAR. You are very interesting to look at, do you know?

JOSEPH. (*absently*) Yes, I know.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Little egotist!

JOSEPH. (*unperturbed*) Yes.

He rises and seats himself at the side of the table. Propping his papyrus against the reclining body of Madam Potiphar, he takes a new sheet of papyrus, and commences to copy a passage.

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*wriggling about to look at him*) What are you copying?

JOSEPH. Be careful. Don't jiggle my manuscript, please!

MADAM POTIPHAR. I asked, what are you copying?

JOSEPH. I am copying some inaccurate information about the climate of Egypt, with reference to the yearly crop-yield. . . . I wonder if there is any one in Egypt who has exact information on that subject? . . .

MADAM POTIPHAR. The yearly crop-yield! What do you care about the yearly crop-yield?

JOSEPH. Never mind. You wouldn't understand if I told you.

MADAM POTIPHAR. You are quite right. Besides, I didn't come here to talk about crops.

JOSEPH. (*writing*) No. You came here to talk about me.

MADAM POTIPHAR. I came here to talk about my cousin Asenath. You knew she was coming--why didn't you tell me you had been in service in her father's household in Heliopolis?

JOSEPH. (*writing*) It wasn't necessary for me to tell you. I knew she would.

MADAM POTIPHAR. No doubt you think we sat there all the time she was combing her hair, and talked about you!

JOSEPH. (*writing*) Precisely.

MADAM POTIPHAR. I suppose you know she is crazy about you!

JOSEPH. (*still writing*) Is she?

MADAM POTIPHAR. She doesn't put it just that way. She says she takes an interest in your future.

JOSEPH. (*continuing to work*) She doesn't take half as much interest in it as I do.

MADAM POTIPHAR. She told me your romantic story: how you had been sold by your brothers into slavery because you wore a coat of many colours. Joseph, did you wear a coat of many colours? That seems a curious thing for any one to be angry about.

JOSEPH. (*not ceasing to copy the manuscript*) I wore it only figuratively--I am wearing it now. And it *always* makes *you* angry.

MADAM POTIPHAR. You mean the cloak of your insolence?

JOSEPH. I mean the cloak of my pride.

MADAM POTIPHAR. I can sympathize with your brothers. . . . Are you in love with her, Joseph?

JOSEPH. I am not.

He has finished--he rolls up the papyrus.

MADAM POTIPHAR. No--so I told her.

JOSEPH. But she didn't believe you. MADAM POTIPHAR. You seem to know our conversation pretty well.

JOSEPH. I can imagine it.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Well, go ahead and imagine it. What did we say?

JOSEPH. You both lied to each other.

MADAM POTIPHAR. About what?

JOSEPH. About me. MADAM POTIPHAR. (*sitting up*) Your conceit is insufferable!

JOSEPH. (*rising politely*) I hope so.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Is that a dismissal?

JOSEPH. If you will be so kind.

MADAM POTIPHAR. You interest me more and more.

JOSEPH. I feared as much.

MADAM POTIPHAR. I detest you!

JOSEPH. It is one of the symptoms.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Young man, do you really know nothing about love?

JOSEPH. If I don't, it is not the fault of the women of Egypt.

MADAM POTIPHAR. You are a strange youth. It cannot be that you love this work you are doing....

JOSEPH. No, madam--I *hate* it.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Then where do you find your happiness? Tell me, Joseph--what is the happiest hour of the day for you?

JOSEPH. (*with complete sincerity*) It is that hour when I have finished the day's work, and can lie down upon my couch. It is the hour before sleep comes, when the room is filled with moonlight, and there is no sound except the crickets singing in the orchard, and the music of the toads in the pool. The wind of the night comes in, cool with dew. Then I am happy--for I can lie and make plans for my future.

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*softly*) And in that hour of moonlight and dew and the music of the crickets, and the ancient love-song of the toads in the pool, when all the earth abandons itself to love,--what would you say to a woman who stole in to you like a moonbeam, like a breath of the night-wind, like a strain of music?

JOSEPH. I would tell her--to go, as her presence would interfere with my plans.

MADAM POTIPHAR. I call the gods to witness. A truly virtuous young man!

JOSEPH. (*jumping down from the table, angrily*) Virtue! Virtue! Oh, you stupid Egyptians! As though I cared about Virtue!

MADAM POTIPHAR. Well, what in the name of all the gods is it that you care about?

JOSEPH. (*vehemently*) In the name of all the gods, madam, I care about time.

MADAM POTIPHAR. Time! But what can you do with time?

JOSEPH. What can I do *without* it?

MADAM POTIPHAR. But I do not understand!

JOSEPH. (*in a cold rage*) Of course you do not understand. You are a great lady--and a fool. I am a wise man--and but an hour ago a slave. I have more intellect than all the population of Egypt put together. Do you expect me to be content to remain as I am? I want power and riches--and I intend to achieve them. And I cannot achieve them if I allow women to waste my time.

MADAM POTIPHAR. (*deeply angered at last*) Very well, I go--taking your secret with me! (*She goes.*)

JOSEPH. (*furiously, to the empty room*) Virtue! My God!

He sits down at his desk and writes vexedly.

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Night. The room is filled with moonlight. Joseph is asleep at his desk.... He suddenly springs up in agitation.

JOSEPH. Ah! . . . It was only a dream! But what a dream! I thought I saw at the door--(*he points*) a strange and terrible animal! (*There is a sound at the door, and he starts back in terror.*) *There it is now!*

The curtains part, and Asenath enters, candle in hand.

ASENATH. Ssh! It is I--Asenath! Don't be afraid!

Joseph recovers his self-possession, and confronts her sternly.

JOSEPH. You, too!

ASENATH. My dear?

JOSEPH. So you have come to afflict me with more romantic folly!

ASENATH. (*with concern*) What is the matter with you, Joseph?

JOSEPH. What is the matter with me? Nothing is the matter with me. Why do you ask?

ASENATH. I think you are not well. You are behaving queerly. You must have been working too hard. How are your nerves?

She approaches him solicitously.

JOSEPH. (*retreating around the table*) Leave me alone, I tell you! Even in my own room can I have no peace? Must I be dogged even in my dreams by shameless and unscrupulous females? Oh, unfortunate youth that I am!

ASENATH. (*setting her candle down on the table*) Now I know what is the matter with you, Joseph! You have an obsession.

JOSEPH. What is an obsession?

ASENATH. Don't you know what an obsession is? (*She sits down on the stool at the end of the table*). Haven't you heard of the great wizard in the land of the barbarians who explains everything by a new magic?

JOSEPH. Is he the author of that popular new dream-book?

ASENATH. Yes. All Egypt is mad on the subject of dreams. Everybody, from Pharaoh to the fiddler's wife, is telling about his latest dream, or listening to some one else tell his.

JOSEPH. (*sitting down on the other stool*) Speaking of dreams, I had a curious one just before you came in.

ASENATH. Did you, Joseph? Tell it to me.

She leans across the table.

JOSEPH. I dreamed--that I saw a dragon with many heads. And each head had the face of a beautiful woman. I was frightened. But I took up a sword and struck. And all the heads except one were severed. All except one. And this one had upon it a crown of iron and a crown of gold. And then the dragon took the crowns from its head, and offered them to me! I did not know what to do. . . . And then I awoke.

ASENATH. Shall I interpret your dream for you, Joseph? The dragon with the many heads signifies the women of Egypt, who are all in love with you. The one that remains when you have struck off the rest, is the one who will succeed where all the others have failed. The crown of iron signifies power. The crown of gold, riches. She offers them to you. . .

JOSEPH. (*leaning forward*) Asenath--do you really think it means--

ASENATH. (*coldly*) I really think it means that you have a persecution--mania. You imagine that every woman you meet has designs on you. . . . I suppose you think that *I* came here to make love to you?

JOSEPH. No, my dear Asenath. I know better than that. When young women come to my room at midnight, it is only to borrow a book to read--or to ask my advice about their personal affairs. I know, because they tell me so. Which did you come for--a book, or advice?

ASENATH. Neither. I came to give a book to you--and to give you some advice.... Do you remember telling me, once in Heliopolis, that the man who knew enough about the climate of Egypt to predict a

famine could make himself the richest man in the kingdom? Well-- here is everything you want to know, in an old book I found in my father's library in Heliopolis. This is the book I came to give you.

She holds out a scroll.

JOSEPH. (*taking it*) Dear Asenath--

ASENATH. (*interrupting him*) And now the advice. It is this. Ally yourself to the wisest woman in the land of Egypt--one who can teach you to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh. Then you shall become the second in power in the kingdom.

JOSEPH. The second in power in the kingdom! Asenath--do not mock me. Can you do this?

ASENATH. I swear that I can and will!

JOSEPH. (*overcome*) You do love me....

ASENATH. (*jumping up*) Love you! What nonsense! (*Scornfully*) Love!

JOSEPH. You--you don't love me?

ASENATH. Not in the least!

JOSEPH. But--but--then what are you doing it for?

ASENATH. I am doing it for *myself*. Do you think I wish to stay in Heliopolis all my life? No--I want power and riches--and I intend to have them. But I cannot get them, unfortunately, without wasting my time with some man.

JOSEPH. And I--?

ASENATH. You are the man.

JOSEPH. Admirable!

ASENATH. Hate me if you will--

JOSEPH. On the contrary! (*He goes toward her.*) Wonderful creature!

ASENATH. (*retreating*) What do you say?

JOSEPH. I say that you are a woman after my own heart. (*He holds out his arms. She retreats to the other end of the table.*) I did not think that there existed in all the world a woman as profoundly egoistic, as unscrupulously ambitious, as myself. You are my true mate. Come, we shall rule Egypt together!

ASENATH. (*in front of the table*) Am I to understand that this is a strictly business proposition?

JOSEPH. No. It is a declaration of love. I adore you! I desire you! I cannot live without you!

ASENATH. Please don't be silly.

JOSEPH. (*hurt*) Is it possible that you do not believe in my love?

ASENATH. It is a little difficult. . . .

JOSEPH. You think that I am a hard man--and so I am. But when I look at you, I tremble and grow weak. My knees are become as water, and the blood roaring in my veins confuses me.

ASENATH. Can I, a mere woman, so disturb you?

JOSEPH. You have more than a mere woman's beauty. Your hands are lotus petals. Your eyes are silver fireflies mirrored in a pool. Your breasts are white birds nestling behind the leaves of a pomegranate tree.

ASENATH. You have a smooth tongue, Joseph! One would think you really were in love at last. . . .

JOSEPH. I love you more than anything else in the world. You mean more to me than power, more than riches, more than freedom itself.

ASENATH. I could almost believe that you are in earnest. . . .

JOSEPH. Tell me, O lovely creature for whom my soul and body thirst, how can I prove my sincerity? What proof can I give you?

ASENATH. You can give me--that ring!

She points to the ring which Potiphar has given him.

JOSEPH. (*looking at her, then at the ring, takes it off, saying*)--
Freedom!

He puts it on her finger. He draws her toward him. She resists. The candle is knocked over, and all is darkness.

ASENATH. (*in the darkness, faintly*) Joseph! Joseph!