

Pharaoh

King of Egypt

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Characters:

Pharaoh

Moses

Aaron (Moses' brother)

Hatsakhmet (Pharaoh's Aunt)

Balaam (A Mesopotamian Seer)

Priests of Pharaoh

Neferatum

Imhotep

Besenmaat

Heti

The young messenger

An ambassador

Two Slaves

The Narrator: This role may be played by a single individual or divided into an ensemble of several voices. Members of the ensemble may include the actors that also play, Balaam, Hatsakhmet, the ambassador, the messenger, and Pharaoh's slaves.

A total of 9- 13 actors are required.

Spectacle:

Music with dance were an essential element in classical tragedy. They are, however, optional in *Pharaoh* unless the play were to be performed in an amphitheater. There are several occasions for choreographed spectacle marked in the script. These are entirely optional. They include: the procession and presentation of gifts by the ambassador (Act I), Rods becoming serpents (Act II), The Nile turning to blood (Act II), The water cleansing ritual (Act III), The funeral (Act IV), Lamentations (Act V).

Pharaoh King of Egypt

- Act 1 -

The Play begins, and ends, with a single male voice singing the first lines of the Kaddish.

Narrator: Pharaoh set over the people of Israel taskmasters to afflict them. And the Egyptians made their lives bitter with hard bondage. And the children of Israel cried by reason of their bondage, and their cry came up unto the Lord. And the Lord said, I have seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry, for I know their sorrows. And I am come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians.

The first scene (and most of the others) are set at the court of Pharaoh. In *Exodus* almost all encounters with Pharaoh are at the river. In the background we have the Nile (or at least some suggestion of the river) The sun is rising over the river.

We see the priests in full Regalia. Heti and Besenmaat are youngish. Besenmaat is in the foreground, Heti will be coming onto the stage. Imhotep and Neferatum, older and full of dignity, are to either side of the center.

Heti comes on stage.

Heti: By the life of Pharaoh, Besenmaat, the whole city is alive with rumors. Moses is back.

Besenmaat: Moses? The young prince? It can't be, Heti, he was banished by Pharaoh ten years ago.

Heti: Banished for killing the overseer, Amonophis. They are saying Moses went into Midian. Married into the family of a local chief and had sons.

Besenmaat: And he's back now, Heti? Why? It's more than his life is worth.

Heti: No one is certain why. I tell you Besenmaat, the city is a hive of speculation. Everyone is talking. There's a Hebrew elder named Aaron who is even claiming to be Moses' brother. Have you heard of this Aaron?

Besenmaat: Yes. A known troublemaker. He's been stirring up insurrection for years.

Heti: Well he seems to be stirring up a full-scale slave revolt now, and he says that Moses will lead it.

Besenmaat: Moses left the capital years before you came to the seminary, Heti, but take it from me, he is no leader. I don't say he's spineless, but he's no leader.

Heti: You don't think the Hebrews will follow him?

Besenmaat: I wouldn't think so. They are a rabble, and rabbles are led by demagogues.

Heti: And this Moses is no demagogue?

Besenmaat: Moses stutters. He's not likely to inspire a mob. And even if he does what's one slave revolt more or less. Pharaoh will put a stop to the disorder soon enough. Trust me.

Heti: Yes, of course, but I remember a slave revolt in Parthas when I was a boy. A lot of people died. A lot of slaves, and even some of us. Do you think I should tell Imhotep what they are saying?.

Besenmaat: Heti, where have you been these last three years. Nothing happens in Egypt that Imhotep doesn't know about. Believe me, he knew when Moses set foot out of Midian.

Heti: Moses and the Hebrew are coming for an audience, today.

Besenmaat: If so, it is a poor choice of days. Today Pharaoh sees only ambassadors. Ambassadors bearing gifts.

The scene shifts to the background.

As we watch, a foreign ambassador arrives in full and exotic Regalia. He comes bearing gifts. The ambassador prostrates himself to the ground. We see the spectacle and the abasement. We do not -- as yet -- see Pharaoh. It may even seem that the ambassadors is abasing himself to the

river itself. We do not hear their words.

Pharaoh emerges from the Nile. Or at least we see him now. He is a gorgeous, powerful man in the prime of his powers. Tall, lean, arrogant, beautiful. The sorcerers move forward with him. Heti and Besenmaat join the others. They are in regalia, Pharaoh is not. He is almost totally nude except for the loin cloth. As the play progresses Pharaoh becomes more and more clothed until in the end when he goes out to meet his death he strips again. His dignity and self-confidence seem to be inversely proportional to the amount of clothing he is wearing. Surrounded by little men in regalia he seems a giant. A slave or two follow after him, prostrated and wiping his feet. We should be totally aware of the abasement of the slaves and even of the ambassadors. Pharaoh, on the other hand, accepts this abasement as entirely natural. He does not notice it. It is part and parcel of the reality of his world.

Imhotep (staff in hand): The ambassador from Nubia has come to pay his respects to the God of the Nile, Pharaoh God of Egypt.

The ambassador comes forward, abases himself, kisses Pharaoh's feet.

Ambassador: God of the Nile, Divine Pharaoh, Sovereign of the Two Lands, Lord of Radiance, Heir of Eternity, may you rise like the sun, rejuvenate yourself like the moon, and repeat life like the flood of the Nile. We your most humble petitioners beg you to accept our offerings.

A Nubian slave brings the gifts handing them one by one to an Egyptian slave. Moses and Aaron enter. They are dressed in coarsely woven desert clothing. Each carry only a simple staff. The ambassador remains on his knees throughout. Pharaoh lifts his head and notices Moses and Aaron. He isn't in a hurry. Eventually, he signals the courtiers to remove the ambassador and the gift. He sits back and silently gestures Moses to speak.

Aaron comes forward and prostrates himself. He kisses Pharaoh's feet and follows the prescribed ritual. Moses remains standing, but bows.

Aaron: (still on his knees) Your majesty, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Tremendous in Strength, Rich in Power, I speak for my brother Moses.

Pharaoh: You speak for your brother?

Aaron: My brother, Moses, is a prophet of our God. It is he who speaks for our God.

Pharaoh: How so, if, as you say, Moses does not even speak for himself?

Aaron: He can speak but haltingly. By the command of our God we have come, your Majesty, to most humbly beg of you a favor.

Pharaoh: Beg, slave. We do not have all morning to listen to a man and a God neither of whom seem to be willing or able to speak for themselves.

Aaron: The Lord, God of Israel, has sent Moses as his ambassador to Pharaoh, King of Egypt and I am my brother's prophet. The Lord the God of Israel has sent us saying let my people go so that they may serve me for three days in the wilderness.

Pharaoh: Who is your Lord that I should hearken unto his voice to let Israel go? I know not your Lord. Has he a name?

Aaron: He is the Lord God. God of the Hebrews.

Pharaoh: And I am the Lord God, God of the Egyptians -- son of the sun god. And this is my land, these are my people, and this is my river. I have made them for myself. All that I will, will I do. Why should I let your people go?

Aaron: We entreat you most humbly to do so, Oh mighty Dragon of the Nile, who art known to be kind and merciful. (Aaron attempts to come forward a few steps. Neferatum steps out and raises his staff.)

Pharaoh: No.

Aaron: Your majesty we implore you. (At a signal from Neferatum, the guards move to remove Aaron. They take hold of him by the arms.)

Pharaoh: Leave us. All of you. Not you Moses.

Moses nods. The sorcerers, the ambassadors, the guards leave. Only Moses and Pharaoh remain. Aaron has been among the last to leave. Although he is still being held by the guards, he looks to Moses for guidance and Moses motions him to leave.

Pharaoh stands, walks over to Moses. As he does so, some, but certainly not all, of the outward signs of majesty and godhood drop from him. Moses is the friend/cousin of his childhood.

Pharaoh: Moses, Moses what have you done? I had expected better of you than this, cousin.
(Pharaoh points to Moses clothing.)

Moses: Your majesty. (Moses stutters badly)

Pharaoh: I have a name, Moses.

Moses: Raamses, I come as your friend.

Pharaoh: Oh I believe that. I don't suppose that either of us has many friends. We are friends and more than friends. I suspect we learned to crawl together. Rekhmire taught us the arts of war together, and Neferatum taught us the arts of the priesthood together.

Moses: You were a better student of both war and the priesthood than I was, Raamses.

Pharaoh: Was I? I was not always so certain. I remember those summer afternoons when we would run off together to the Nile leaving the others behind -- all the cousins and the teachers and the priests -- before I became weighted down with divinity and kingship. We were children, in so far as the gods allow one of their own a childhood.

Moses: And in so far as a Pharaoh is allowed brothers, or even cousins, we were friends. But we were boys, Raamses and now we are grown men.

Pharaoh: Have I changed so much, Moses?

Moses: No. Like a lotus blossom you have opened to fulfill your promise. Then you were Pharaoh-to-be, and now you are Pharaoh. What has happened to the others? Where are they?

Pharaoh: The other cousins? I sent them away. Family members are dangerous to heirs apparent and to Pharaohs.

Moses: You sent them away as you did me?

Pharaoh: No. You gave me a reason, Moses. You killed an officer of the state. My legitimate but stupid cousins merely conspired behind my back. They have all received lucrative postings in the outer provinces. Unfortunately, one or two of them continued to act up.

Moses: And?

Pharaoh: They died.

Moses: Sudden deaths?

Pharaoh: Who can question the hand of God?

Moses: They were not very bright. Even as boys. Poor souls.

Pharaoh: But you were bright. It's why we were friends. You were always bright and witty and funny even with the stammer. It's surprising how quickly one becomes reaccustomed to the stammer.

Moses: I have never become accustomed to it in the first place. And I was much safer than the others. The others were sons and grandsons of the Pharaohs, but I was thought to be, at best, a bastard son of Pharaoh's sister.

Pharaoh: And she never admitted as much, although why anyone would want Hatsakhmet as a mother I don't know.

Moses: Hatsakhmet is a difficult woman. She has always been bitter.

Pharaoh: Bitter! She is a bottomless well of bitterness and hatred. Have you ever asked her who your father was?

Moses: No. She was never a mother to me.

Pharaoh: Granted. Could she have been a mother to anyone? I don't wonder that you repudiated her. But her blood, at least, is exquisitely divine. And that story she told about finding you in the Nile circumcised no less. That story is, I suppose, the reason you now present yourself as the brother of Aaron the Levite of humble birth.

Moses: Aaron is a prince of the Levites.

Pharaoh: Then Aaron is a prince of a dung heap -- a Levite piece of scum and a pompous idiot. Why, in the name of Isis, have you chosen to ally yourself with such people? It's not as if you were ever made to *suffer* for your birth.

Moses: No. Hatsakhmet protected me, and you befriended me.

Pharaoh: You were a beloved of the gods of Egypt. And even later we were inseparable. By the gods, we shared our first women together, and our first whole keg of beer.

Moses: As I recall, you were first with both..

Pharaoh: As befits a King. I warned the women for you, and I suffered the hangovers. Pure acts of friendship.

Moses: Yes. I was your playmate and, in some ways, your plaything. And I loved you, but you dazzle me, Raamses. You have always dazzled me. You dazzled all of us with your beauty and, even then, with the force of your majesty. You were born to dazzle the world.

Pharaoh: Has it been ten years since you were banished? And in that time you've managed to acquire a new people, a new God, and a new brother. Not to mention a wife and sons -- or so my spies tell me. Why did you come back? In the name of our friendship, I didn't have you killed, even when you murdered Amonophis. Is this how you repay me?

Moses: Perhaps neither kings or prophets can afford either friends or cousins. I felt I had no choice, Raamses.

Pharaoh: There are always choices.

Moses: It is not always easy being a prophet, Raamses.

Pharaoh: And it is not always easy being a god. You know I could understand if you'd come with that wily old campaigner whose daughter you had the good sense to marry. Jethro may be a man of the desert, but he is not without status. But the Hebrews? How can you believe you are one of them?

Moses: I *am* one of them Raamses.

Pharaoh: Nonsense. In a single moment of emotion you murdered an overseer who was beating a slave. It was an emotional response -- nothing more. And to justify that act, in your own mind, you tell yourself that the slaves are your people.

Moses: No. I don't think so. But you are right that in an act of the moment I killed Amonophis. I saw an injustice, and I reacted instinctively against it. I was scarcely aware that I lifted the spear and killed Amonophis. I did so in the same way that I might have leaped into the Nile to save a drowning child. But I would do it again, Raamses. Amonophis was a brute and he was lashing that poor man to death. It was senseless abuse.

Pharaoh: Moses, Moses, have you learned nothing about the world in all these years. Abusing slaves. Is that possible? They are after all slaves. He was beating them. Slaves do not always work willingly. They do not always die willingly. But to work and to die is, after all, their function in life.

Moses: They are people.

Pharaoh: They have been slaves forever. And they will be slaves forever. What makes you think that these things will change? The River rises and the River falls. There are seasons to all things, but no change. Believe me, Moses, I am a god and I know these things. These people have been created simply as our tools.

Moses: Discontented tools.

Pharaoh: It is too much to ask even of slaves that they be *always* contented. You are a brilliant man. You would have been a brilliant leader. We really should have found someone for you to lead. Now you've found yourself some people to lead, and you have chosen

unwisely, cousin.

Moses: They *are* my people.

Pharaoh: Yes, of course. Just as that pompous idiot is your brother.

(Moses smiles openly.)

Moses: Aaron the Levite is my brother. My older brother. At times he makes a great deal of his seniority.

Pharaoh: Brother! I know better. Remember I am your cousin. And this talk of going into the wilderness merely to make sacrifices is rubbish. If you must lead a slave revolt, Moses, you could at least do so honestly.

Moses: (Moses smiles again and bows) We did not say that we would be gone *only* three days. It is a face-saving device. Nothing more. It will allow you to save face.

Pharaoh: Yes. I understand face-saving devices. Face is very important to gods and kings, and believe me, I intend to lose no face at all.

Moses: Raamses, it is not a laughing matter. I implore you, let these people go.

Pharaoh: Why?

Moses: Because it is the right thing to do -- the noble thing to do. Because you do not need them to build even more memorials to the dead. And because if you do not bend in this there will be untold suffering, for you, for Egypt, and for Israel. With or without your consent, God will take them out of Egypt.

Pharaoh: Then it will have to wait for your god to do so. I had expected more from you, Moses, not these simple-minded threats. I have responsibilities to the River and to the land and to the people. To the living and even more so the dead. Look about you. At this oasis, this miracle of green which is Egypt. Look at its temples, its granaries, its cities.

Moses: Built by slaves.

Pharaoh: Just so.

Moses: And if there is a slave revolt?

Pharaoh: Then there will be a slave revolt. What of it? Slaves make revolts every few years. They rise up, and we strike them down. They have no arms and no skills. Their gods are weak. What are they, these so-called children of Israel, a poor desert people loaded down with superstition and living in darkness. I'll send out the chariots, kill a few thousand, torture a few more thousand, and the revolution will be over. Order will be restored. It is the way of the world -- a world of slaves and masters. They cannot do more, and we cannot do less. It has always been so, and it will always be so.

Moses: I tell you, Raamses that it will be different this time. This is different. Their God will destroy you.

Pharaoh: (reverting to being Pharaoh) Go, cousin. Tell this Aaron and his people to take back up their burdens. It is quite the kindest thing you can do for them.

Pharaoh alone on the stage with Neferatum and Imhotep who is taking notes. Pharaoh has put on a light cloak of some sort. It seems to be evening now.

Neferatum: My lord, it is the right thing to do. You are the Protector and the Refuge of all Egypt. Look about you. Egypt is calm and at peace. The store houses have been filled to capacity and the dead have been appeased. The Gods are in harmony. There is order in the Two Lands. Why even risk a slave rebellion?

Pharaoh: And you Imhotep?

Imhotep: It is regrettable, my King, but it is probably necessary.

Pharaoh: Read it back, Imhotep.

Imhotep: Message to the Overseers of the Slaves: The Hebrew slaves have been growing restless. It is Pharaoh's decree that heavier burdens be put on both the men and the

women. Every effort should be made to extract the most possible labor from the Hebrews. They must be worked until they break. If any seek to shirk the additional work, they should be beaten as a visible example to the others. If any should speak out against us, they should be tortured, and then publicly hung. In this as in all else my counsel shall stand. All that I will, will I do.

Pharaoh: (Pharaoh sighs) It should do.

Scene moves to Moses. Alone on stage. He comes center stage and looks up and around about him. To the North, the South, the East, the West. The form of this monologue begins as a dudele and ends as a psalm. Making the transition may not be simple. Moses is talking to God. We do not hear God. When talking to God, Moses does not stutter.

Moses: Plagues? I am to threaten Pharaoh with plagues. It won't work, you know. But of course you know that.

I have done what you asked -- what you have told me to do although I told you what would happen. But I did as I was commanded. Do you see what we have wrought? Raamses has more than doubled the work load. The first day the overseers told them there would be bonuses for added production -- nights with their husbands and their wives. It was as if the poor wretches were being told that work would make them free. I told them it was a trick, a sadistic trick, but they didn't listen. They rarely do listen, you know. The poor fools worked their hearts out that day, and the results were dutifully recorded. Egyptian scribes keep impeccable records. It has been three weeks. Every single day the quota has been increased. Men are dying where they stand. Women are withering away, their infants are starving to death. I have seen men who slacked off from exhaustion lashed to death. I have seen a man flayed alive as an example. And all this suffering because I went to Pharaoh.

I tell myself that I only followed your instructions. That I was trying to do what was right, at least as I have been given to see the right. But our enemies surround us, and we are being dragged down into the pit. How much, Oh Lord, how much suffering must your people bear?

And you knew. You had to know that going to Raamses like that would have this effect. Even I, even I, knew. I've known him since we were children. There is a nobility about him, but he cannot be challenged, and certainly not by some god of a slave people who doesn't have a name. Raamses cannot begin to understand that. He cannot believe. He believes that he himself is a god. And a man who can believe that of himself is an atheist.

And now you speak of plagues and infinitely more suffering. And, as you make the common Egyptians suffer, those poor ignorant idolaters will vent their hatred against us. Pharaoh will not bend. He cannot bend, and be Pharaoh. It hardly matters. He cannot bend, and he cannot win.

My mind understands what you are doing. My heart, oh Lord, my heart does not. I look at my people and at their blood and their tears and I am filled with rage -- at the overseers, at Pharaoh, and at You.

We are the chosen people. And, our enemies have enslaved us for generations. We have bled to death building monuments to their dead. It is as if our youngest and best were marched into those tombs and buried alive with their carcasses. Is this what we were chosen for? Where is your justice, and where is your mercy? How long, Oh Lord, how long?

Oh Lord, help me to understand.

Oh Lord, save me for the waters are come in onto my soul.

Pharaoh: King of Egypt

- Act 2 -

Aaron and Moses come on stage together with Neferatum.

Neferatum: Your god must speak for himself. Pharaoh, God of the Niles, does not deal through intermediaries. I am chief advisor to Pharaoh on matters of the gods, as I was to Pharaoh's divine father. Tell me again, Aaron the Levite, *who* is this god so that I will be able to advise Pharaoh how to deal with him. It is my sacred responsibility to keep a catalogue of the gods by name. The matter, as you are surely aware, is most delicate.

Decorum between the gods must be strictly observed, particularly when dealing with foreign gods.

Aaron: (*Aaron looks to Moses for guidance. Almost imperceptibly, Moses shrugs.*) Our God is not like other gods, Master Sorcerer.

Neferatum: That is what I have been saying. No god is quite like other gods. Every god is unique.

Aaron: The Lord our God is King of the Universe, creator of heaven and earth and all that is therein.

Neferatum: How impressive. Tell me has this god of yours created the Nile?

Aaron: Yes, your eminence, He is the creator of the Nile.

Neferatum: How can this be, Jew? Perhaps this God of yours has had a hand in creating the Tigris and the Euphrates. But this River, this River Nile, this is Pharaoh's own. He has made it for himself and for Egypt.

Aaron: Your eminence. I pray you listen, we have only come to entreat Pharaoh to be merciful and to let our people go that they may serve our God in the wilderness.

(Pharaoh comes on stage. Aaron turns to Pharaoh who ignores him. Pharaoh's eyes, his very being, is fixed for the moment on Moses.)

Pharaoh: (addressing a silent Moses) And is this god of yours merciful?

Aaron: His justice and his mercy shall endure forever, and his signs and wonders in every generation.

Pharaoh: Signs and wonders. Ah, I see. Imhotep, we are about to be entertained by signs and wonders.

Aaron: Your majesty?

Pharaoh: Produce your signs and wonders, Aaron the Levite, and Neferatum and my sorcerers will produce their signs and wonders. I am disposed to be entertained this morning.

Narrator: And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called for his wise men and the sorcerers; and the magicians of Egypt did in like manner with their secret arts. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents; but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. (While The narrator speaks Aaron and the priests raise and lower their staffs. There are ways in which this sequence can be represented visually if possible.)

(Pharaoh is clearly amused by the display.)

Pharaoh: Very clever. I have never seen that bit of magic before. You slaves clearly do not have enough work to do, if you can spend your time creating new tricks.

Aaron prostrates himself: With all respect to Pharaoh who is a refuge to all in Egypt, your overseers have placed great burdens on our people. They are made to do more work than mere men and women are able to do.

Pharaoh: Then, invoke the help of this god of yours. This creator of heaven and earth and all that is therein. Let *him* relieve their work. Let *him* build our temples, our cities, and our store houses.

Aaron: Oh Dragon of the Nile, do not, I pray you, make sport of God. Our God will not suffer insult. In this shall you know that He is the Lord. Through Moses, my brother, the Lord has instructed me to take this rod which is in my hands and to smite the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that are in the river shall die, and the river shall become foul; and the Egyptians shall loathe to drink water from the river. And blood will be everywhere throughout the waters of Egypt. (Aaron smites the river)

Narrator: And the magicians of Egypt did in a like manner with their secret arts and Pharaoh and his sorcerers made mock of Aaron the Levite.

Pharaoh: Leave us.

Moses, Pharaoh, Imhotep, and Neferatum remain on stage.

Moses: Raamses, I entreat you. Let my people go.

Pharaoh: No.

Moses: Why not?

Neferatum. It is obvious, Moses. There are too many of these Jews. They are a threat.

Moses: Why? These people have never threatened Egypt. They have worked on your temples and storehouses, they have tended their flocks, and they have added to your prosperity. They have never allied themselves to your enemies.

Neferatum: They have never had occasion to do so, much less the means to do so. If there is a war, they may very well join our enemies and make war on us, as you have joined with Jethro the Chief of the Midians.

Moses: Nonsense. If they are far from Egypt how can they possibly be a threat to you? And Jethro, my father-in-law, is not your enemy. He is not making war.

Imhotep: He is not a particularly good friend of Egypt, Moses.

Moses: He is neither friend nor foe. He is, for his sins, a rather independent old dessert chieftain. He pays you tribute.

Imhotep: Jethro is somewhat too independent for our tastes. His tribute to Pharaoh last year was not adequate. But I agree, he does not make war.

Moses: Nor do the children of Israel. We have no interest in war.

Pharaoh: I have only your word on that, Moses. And you do not control the children of Israel. You may think you speak for them at the moment, but it is rather inevitable that they will soon be out of your control.

Neferatum: They are a formless rabble, and you have neither the blood nor the tools to be their

King.

Imhotep: Then what, Moses? A rabble so large is capable of doing great harm.

Pharaoh: I cannot and will not expose my people to such risks.

Moses: You expose your people to much greater risks by hardening your heart against my entreaties, Raamses.

Pharaoh: So you say, Moses. But I have only your word on that as well.

Moses: You have seen the waters of the Nile become blood.

Imhotep: We have seen a trick, Moses. If the Hebrews go, who will do the work?

Moses: The work of building temples to the dead?

Imhotep: And the work of building the other public projects which make Egypt great. We are not a nation of desert dwelling shepherds. The gods have granted us this ribbon of paradise which Pharaoh tends as a sacred trust. It is his sacred trust as God in Egypt to keep this world radiant and at peace. And he builds temples and memorials to praise and to placate the gods and the dead who reside with them.

Neferatum: Beware lest the dead strike you down, Moses. The dead are amongst us always. We depend on their protection and their good will.

Moses: The dead are only rotting flesh. Bones and dust.

Neferatum lifts his staff almost as if he is warding off a curse and even Imhotep steps back shocked at what they perceive as blasphemy.

Pharaoh: Leave us, Neferatum, Imhotep.

They leave..

Moses: At least end the suffering you have newly imposed, Raamses.

Pharaoh: Do you think I enjoy the suffering, Moses? You, you, have forced me to this. You and your threats and your rebellions. You should have stayed in Midian. Why, in the name of Isis, did you come back? Why were the sheep, and the wife, and that wily bastard of a father-in-law not enough?

Moses: You believe that I am allowing myself to be used by Jethro?

Pharaoh: You are being used by both Jethro and by this man Aaron. Jethro is at most a minor annoyance, and I have been dealing with that annoyance since my father's death. Aaron has far less to lose, and is therefore more dangerous. Of course he is using you. For the last ten years this Aaron, this man who purports to be your brother, has been fomenting revolution in your name. And your name has proven damnably convenient to Aaron. You, a Prince of Egypt who struck down an overseer. And then when you came back, they believed in you.

Moses: They did, didn't they? But, as you have pointed out, the problem with people believing in leaders is that it doesn't last.

Pharaoh: Of course they believed in you. You had the passwords. A mysterious prophecy by a conveniently mysterious and unnamed unseen god. The god of their Fathers -- whoever their fathers were.

Moses: Their Fathers were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Pharaoh: Desert chieftains on the order of your esteemed father-in-law. You would think that if a people is going to invent antecedents they would have picked a more distinguished lot.

Moses: Perhaps, but the children of Israel don't believe that they are descended from gods.

Pharaoh: Clearly they have the right of it. Had they been descended from the gods, they would not be slaves, would they?

Moses: Our God will deliver us from slavery, Raamses.

Pharaoh: That is only a prophecy, Moses. Oracles and prophecies can be purchased for a pittance. Peasants buy them in the marketplace. Is it your vision or Aaron's ambition that

informs this prophecy? Royalty are never used, they use others. Have you learned nothing in my Father's house, cousin?

Moses: Perhaps I am willing to be used in the service of justice.

Pharaoh: Justice? What is justice except what the King declares it to be. You have invented a justice of the meek and the powerless. It is a contradiction in terms. It is only authority and power that validate justice. And these people are without power, as they are without valor. They turned on you when you slew the overseer. Did you know, they informed against you. They will turn on you again. Without my authority and the fear of my power to restrain them, they will become a senseless self-destructive mob.

Moses: They are people. People who are being buried alive by your bricks and pyramids.

Pharaoh: Undoubtedly a far more noble end than they deserve.

Moses: Do you feel no sympathy for the suffering you have created.

Pharaoh: I do not create suffering for the joy of it. Yes, I feel some sympathy. The same sting of sympathy I feel when young herd animals are slaughtered for food. No more sympathy, and often less. The herd animals are, on the whole, more pleasant than these slaves. One does what is necessary.

Moses: Who made you judge of what is necessary?

Pharaoh: I made me judge. To judge is one of the responsibilities of Godhood.

Moses: How do you *know* you are a God?

Pharaoh: Every Pharaoh since the beginning of time has been a god. Every Pharaoh has been a divine protector of this oasis Egypt since the day of Creation. *I don't* invent gods, Moses. You do. How do you *know* you are a prophet?

Moses: You wouldn't understand, Raamses.

Pharaoh: Try to make me understand.

Moses: (Turns his back on Pharaoh for a moment and when he turns back he begins to muse -- apparently very far from the topic at hand.) I make a very good shepherd, Raamses. In the last few years I have taken to going up into the hills alone with the sheep.

Pharaoh: You always loved the high desert.

Moses: As you have always loved this rich green valley, Raamses.

Pharaoh: Has it every occurred to you, Moses, that it is you who embrace death, and I who love life and people?

Moses: Why? Because I love the solitude, the heat of the sun in my face, the clear wind scouring the rocks. I feel alive in the mountains, Raamses. I'd been out with the sheep six weeks on Mount Horeb, some call it Sinai. Six weeks roaming in the hills of the summer pasturage is enough to clear anyone's mind.

Pharaoh: Or drive one to madness.

Moses: Is there a difference? In any case, I was carrying a lamb back to the herd after it had wandered off toward the stream when I came across a thorn bush.

Pharaoh: I imagine thorn bushes are plentiful in the wilderness.

Moses: It was burning.

Pharaoh: Not uncommon. It was, as you said, during the heat of the summer.

Moses: It was burning and it was not being consumed. I remember the lamb twisting out of my arms and running back toward the flock. And then I reached out to touch the bush.

Pharaoh: Touch it?

Moses: I couldn't. Not because of the fire, but because of the Divine Presence. I felt God. I was filled with His presence. It was as real as the marble beneath our feet or the staff in my hands. The Spirit of God was *more* real. These things are simply shadows of the real. I was terrified. I turned and I tried to run. But I couldn't run, Raamses. Then a voice spoke to me.

Pharaoh: From out of the bush?

Moses: Perhaps. It was not a large voice. It was only a voice -- a still small voice. And it told me I had to go back and lead my people out of slavery.

Pharaoh: And so on the strength of a vision fostered after you had lost your mind up in the hills, you have come back and caused the death of thousands of these people.

Moses: Yes. And if you do not let these people go, Raamses, thousands more will die and many of them will be Egyptians.

Pharaoh: Did it never occur to you, Moses, that the voice was an illusion which you created, like a mirage, out of the sun and the solitude?

Moses: I knew it was no illusion.

Pharaoh: Did you ask for confirmation? Did you test the truth of this revelation?

Moses: Test God! I a mere son of man. He is what he is. But yes, I, like the merest child, I asked for miracles. It was a test of God, you understand. He treated me like the child I was acting, but he gave me three miracles. Is that confirmation? It didn't matter you see. I knew that it was the voice of God. I was speaking with God. Not one god among many, but the one true God. It was the voice of the universe. And perhaps even that didn't matter. What that voice was asking me to do was right, Raamses. This slavery of these people -- this treating people as if they are lambs for slaughter -- is wrong. It is morally wrong.

Pharaoh: And so you came back and caused all this slaughter.

Moses: The suffering was *your* decision.

Pharaoh: It must be convenient to be able to slough off your responsibility for all of this, Moses. Where is this divine compassion you speak of? Is it compassionate to watch his people mired down in slavery and suffering? They are *his* people. Is this compassion? Is it compassionate to see them killed, beaten, abused, their women raped? And you say they are chosen. Chosen and marked by this bodily mutilation which you yourself did not

willingly inflict on your own children. What are they chosen for? It seems to me that in the eyes of your god, if he is a god, they are chosen for nothing more or less than suffering. Is this compassion? They are like the dumb beasts of the field.

Moses: They are not beasts of the field.

Pharaoh: That is precisely what they are. It is a question of power. As a god I understand that.

Moses: As a man, I am compassionate. I am not ashamed of that.

Pharaoh: Then perhaps you should be. It is no virtue to destroy the natural order of being that has nurtured us all. Look about you. Is peace and stability so easily cast aside? You, who are so full of smug self-assurance, don't you even see what you are doing?

Moses: Oh, I see Raamses. At times, I see too clearly. And at times, I doubt God and I doubt what I am doing. I am only human and at times I am filled with shame and confusion. But He carries me out of doubt.

Pharaoh: Listen to yourself, cousin. Weakness, doubt, shame, confusion. These are infectious diseases. Self-weakness and self-doubt. These are not the qualities of god. They are not even the qualities of real men. They are the qualities of slaves and women. Your God has emasculated his people. He has chosen them for slavery. It is he, and not I that has made them so. He understands that, if you do not. He understands power.

Moses: I beg you to yield, Raamses. Yield while you can.

Pharaoh: I cannot yield, and be Pharaoh.

Moses: He said you would harden your heart.

Pharaoh: Then your god gives me more respect than you do, Moses.

Moses: If you do not yield, God help all of us, He will obliterate you, and thousands of others.

Pharaoh: Then, this merciful new god of yours sounds just like all the other gods. Cruel, alien, omnipotent and still almost human.

Pharaoh King of Egypt

- Act 3 -

Heti: I come from the city.

Besenmaat: Does it occur to you, Heti, that you spend too much time in the city?

Heti: It grows worse, Besenmaat. All the water in Egypt seems corrupted by this curse of Moses. It's been seven days. Our streams, our rivers, our ponds, have become like blood. And the fish that were in the river have died; and the river stinks, and the people cannot drink the water of the river. I tell you there is blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

Besenmaat: Yes, we know all of that. Imhotep tells us that it happens every twenty years or so - - this discoloration of the waters. It is nothing to worry about. Drinking the water will not kill people. At worst it will make them ill. And it should be over now. In fact, Neferatum has invoked the help of the goddess. They are cleansing the waters as we speak.

Scene in the background is the spectacle of an Egyptian religious cleansing ceremony. Neferatum is directing the ceremony. Again, we hear no words coming from the participants in the background.

Besenmaat: So what are the town's people *saying*, Heti? What do the people *know*?

Heti: It is mostly rumor. The people are afraid to drink the water. Some say the Hebrews have poisoned the waters. The Hebrews or their gods. The Hebrews have not been getting so sick drinking the water.

Besenmaat: Imhotep tells us one doesn't become ill if one boils the water. The Hebrews, by custom, boil their water. It is a superstition of theirs. Do our people know about Moses' curse?

Heti: There is talk of curses everywhere. And people assume that it's something to do with the Hebrews. Most of our people don't mind of course. It isn't them who are being worked

to death. But now even some Egyptians have begun to question the overseers' judgement.

Besenmaat: And so it is easier, perhaps better, to believe, that the Hebrews are responsible for poisoning the water? It gives us a reason to work them to death.

Heti: (shrugs) It's all still rumor. Has Moses come to Pharaoh again?

Besenmaat: Yes. He comes almost every day now. It seems to amuse Pharaoh. Look they are coming now. It is no time for mere priests to be seen.

(Pharaoh and Moses enter and Pharaoh watches for a few moments as Neferatum continues with the cleansing ritual.)

Pharaoh: The women are beautiful. I believe I will have that one brought to me. I still have an almost inexhaustible appetite for women. They say I have it from my grandfather Horus.

Moses: Word has it that you have a harem of thousands.

Pharaoh: I don't keep count. Nor do I keep count of the offspring they bear me. The daughters are trading material of sorts, but the sons may become a problem.

Moses: They say you have nearly fifty sons.

Pharaoh: So they say. Perhaps I am fortunate that my father did not have my appetites. I have no siblings. But I imagine that when I die the fraternal blood bath will be gruesome. Most of the children don't count. Their blood is poor.

Moses: They are your children.

Pharaoh: Not in the sense you mean. At any given time I suppose ten of my women are actually breeding. I have an essence which is of the gods, and a body which is of the earth. These are merely children of my earth. The product of momentary physical urges. Offspring of my body, if you will, and not of my soul. They are the sons of women chosen for their beauty, and not for their blood. They do not have my ka. They mean nothing. A more prudent man might have had the sons slaughtered at birth to avoid future bloodshed. I do, of course, take an interest in my sons by the Queen, whose blood is impeccable, she is my

cousin Pedibastat's daughter.

Moses: I remember her as a very pretty child.

Pharaoh: She has become a very beautiful and very loving woman. A man could do far worse. We have two sons. The oldest is six now. I call him Raamses. He will be Pharaoh.

Moses: Do you spend much time with them?

Pharaoh: Yes. They fill my heart and delight my soul. And, as it turns out, I have a gift for fatherhood. Then too, I must teach the next Raamses to be Pharaoh or he will not be able to manage the River, the people, and the fraternal blood bath. You have sent your two sons off to Midian, haven't you. They will probably have become Jethro's sons by the time you see them again. Speaking of which, I've sent for Hatsakhmet. I've asked her to come.

Moses: (Stiffens) Why?

Pharaoh: Neferatum tells me some people are concerned. They are asking who is this man, this Moses? Neferatum claims that some people are muttering that you might even be the true Pharaoh.

Moses: Neferatum has known me all my life. He knows who I am.

Pharaoh: Do even you know who are you are, Moses?

Moses: Yes. I know who I am. I am a Hebrew and a prophet of the Hebrew God. I am the brother of Aaron the Levite. I am merely the son of a man, and not of a god. You believe that I am the bastard son of a royal princess, but even as a son of Amram and Yochebed my birth is tainted.

Pharaoh: So Imhotep's spies tell us.

Moses: It is no secret among the Hebrews that my mother Jochebed is my father Amram's aunt. Believe me, my enemies do not let me forget it. My birth is tainted -- either birth. I am no contender for Pharaoh. And I have absolutely no designs on your Egypt.

Pharaoh: I know you have no designs on Egypt. I've always known that. I trusted you – even loved you.

Moses: As much as a Pharaoh can allow himself to love.

Pharaoh: You were my friend. It is why I have never had you killed. Not when we were boys, and not even when you killed Amonophis. Perhaps letting you live then was a mistake. In any case, only one person *really* knows who you are. And you I think are terrified of Hatsakhmet and of what she might say.

Moses: I have always been terrified of Hatsakhmet. She asks too much of me. She overwhelms me with her need.

Pharaoh: Nevertheless, even on your own account she saved your life when she took you from the water.

Moses: My true mother, Aaron's mother, set me afloat when the Egyptians came to kill me. It was *your* father's edict to kill the Hebrew newborn males that put me on the river that day.

Pharaoh: Yes, another little bit of Neferatum's advice. Still, Hatsakhmet claimed you were her son.

Moses: Adoptive son.

Pharaoh: Adoptive son. Except of course that everyone knew that Hatsakhmet had been pregnant before she returned with you in her arms. Hatsakhmet, at the least, seems to have put my Father's edict to some good use. Have you ever asked her who you are?

Moses: Would it make a difference if I had? She is your father's sister.

Pharaoh: True. She answers in infinite riddles as befits a Goddess. It is a skill I would have been wise to acquire. She has been living in seclusion among the great pyramids near Giza. They tell me she is a monument of sorts -- in the style of the nearby sphinx. She sees few people. But Imhotep tells me that she has consented to come.

Moses: Leave Hatsakhmet with the Sphinx in Giza, Raamses. She will only add to the contamination in the land. Leave her and end it all now. Only let my people go. It is no longer only my words which I speak here. You have evidence. You have the rivers of blood.

Pharaoh: A natural occurrence. It happens once in almost every generation according to Imhotep.

Moses: That is what you choose to believe.

Pharaoh: The rest is the hysteria of the people. The blood in the river is as much a creation of your imagination as is this thornbush god of yours.

Moses: If you do not let these people go, there will be more disasters.

Pharaoh: And more threats. We will survive your threats and we will survive the popular hysteria. I am a god and a leader of men. There is a King in Egypt.

Moses: It is hysteria yes. And popular hysteria perhaps. But it is a *justified* hysteria. There will be more plagues, and your own people will turn on you. And they will turn on you only as a people can turn on a god who has betrayed them. They will devour you, Raamses. In the name of heaven, yield.

Narrator: Still Pharaoh refused to let the Hebrews go. And so Aaron stretched out his rod over the waters; and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt. And the frogs came into their houses, and their bed chambers, and their beds, and the houses of their servants, and upon the people. But Pharaoh's magicians did their own enchantments and brought forth frogs, and so Pharaoh was not moved.

Aaron: You've come from Pharaoh?

Moses nods.

Aaron: What did he say? Did you explain?

Moses: Leave me be, Aaron.

Aaron: What am I to say to the people?

Moses (stooped but resigned): I will speak to the people.

Narrator: When the frogs were throughout the whole land, Pharaoh agreed to let the people go and the frogs died out of the houses, out of the villages, and out of the fields. But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto Moses and Aaron. And then the dust of the earth became lice in man, and in beast; in all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh's magicians tried to do the same with their enchantments, but they could not do so.

Imhotep: Yes, I know, revered Majesty. You know I am no alarmist. I believe that there are natural explanations for each of these plagues. The frogs were driven from the river by the infestation, and it is the frogs which carried these lice-like creatures. But there is a chance – just a chance – that we are, in fact, dealing with a new and fairly powerful god.

Pharaoh: It is like shadow boxing, isn't it, Imhotep? We cannot see the enemy. We burned the frogs, and cleared the vermin, and suffered the lice. But a god we cannot see and we cannot hear, we cannot fight.

Imhotep: It is what it is. Whatever is causing these disasters, natural or otherwise, could be a force that we, your priests, do not as yet understand. We need respite.

Pharaoh: I will speak to Moses. He will stay the plague.

Imhotep: But worse may come unless we actually allow them to leave. The Hebrews have become a source of deep discontent and disorder in the land. They say they only want to go for three days. Why not take them at their word? Once in the wilderness most of them will turn back to the security of Egypt in any case. We will do far better with fewer of them and, if need be, we can always find new people to enslave.

Neferatum has come onto the stage.

Neferatum: It will not be so simple, Imhotep. Moses tells me that people are not meant to be slaves. Look about you. What would Egypt be without the slaves. Yes, we could grow

the crops and harvest the wheat. But we would have no pyramids, no public works, no majesty, no memorials to the dead. We have made this world ours and we have made the earth and the river our servants. We took the world and we formed it. We Egyptians have mastered science, technology, the very stars. And to maintain it all, we need slaves, Imhotep. It is ridiculous to believe that we are being bested by a handful of dirty superstitious nomads.

Imhotep: Yes, I know, Neferatum, but what if we are being bested?

Neferatum: Egypt will never be bested. Egypt is forever.

Pharaoh: They have a creation myth. These barbarians cannot even *imagine* antiquity as great as ours. We were building pyramids when, even by their own account, they were still a formless void. How can this people or their upstart god, threaten *us*? It will be in the end as it was at the beginning. Go, leave me be.

Narrator: And there came a grievous swarm of flies into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt: the land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of flies.

Hatsakhmet accompanied by Imhotep is brought into the presence of the Pharaoh. She comes with her handmaids who make obeisance. She does not make obeisance. Pharaoh does not stand. He remains on the throne wearing a goodly supply of the trappings of royalty. She is dressed in the manner of Sakhmet the lion goddess. Her headdress is sphinx-like.

Hatsakhmet: Nephew.

Pharaoh: Honored Aunt. It is always a joy to receive my divine father's sister.

Hatsakhmet: Do not think that I come in response to your summons, nephew.

Pharaoh: I am well aware, Aunt, that you have come of your own free will.

Hatsakhmet: I came because I heard the rumors. Who has not? And I have seen signs and wonders, as we all have. It has been a year of mighty plagues. They tell me that my son Moses has created them. Is this true?

Pharaoh: Do you think I know the answer, honored Aunt?

Hatsakhmet: Probably not. I ask only as a courtesy.

Pharaoh: As a courtesy, I will answer, most honored aunt. Moses tells me that he is not the authors of these plagues and contaminations on the body of Egypt. He claims that he is simply the humble messenger, the prophet of a new divinity. The divinity of the Hebrews.

Hatsakhmet: And you believe him? It seems rather late in the game doesn't it for the divinity of the Hebrews to manifest himself.

Pharaoh: Perhaps this Divinity makes his appearances late in order to make a grander entrance. His entrance has certainly been grand. Moses, honored aunt, does not believe he is your son.

Hatsakhmet: And how would he know? A man does not know the circumstances of his own birth.

Imhotep. Is he your son, divine highness?

Hatsakhmet: What woman would not claim such a powerful son, Imhotep?

Imhotep: But, divine highness, is he your son? It makes a difference to the people?

Hatsakhmet: And it makes a difference to you, Imhotep. Has it worried you? And our young Pharaoh who sits here clothed in all his dignity. Has it worried our beautiful young Pharaoh?

Pharaoh: Do I seem worried, honorable aunt?

Hatsakhmet: You do not want me to answer that question, nephew. Nor, I think do you want me to answer the other question.

Pharaoh: Perhaps not, but Imhotep does.

Hatsakhmet: Imhotep is an old woman. Ask him to leave and we will talk. What I say to you is for your ears only. The two of us will talk. We do not need mere mortals corrupting our air.

Pharaoh gestures for Imhotep to leave. He hesitates but bows himself out.

Hatsakhmet: How do you tolerate him? How do you tolerate any of them? Pretentious little people.

Pharaoh: Power, even for a God, Honorable Aunt, must be mediated. One grows accustomed to the presence of mere mortals.

Hatsakhmet: Cynicism? And in one so young, and beautiful.

Pharaoh: And powerful, dear Aunt. You have not changed. You always resented me, and you have always resented my beauty.

Hatsakhmet: Resentment is perhaps not adequate to express my dislike. Even as a child you were insufferable. And your father was seduced by your beauty. Just as he was seduced by your fool of a mother.

Pharaoh: Ah yes, my mother.

Hatsakhmet: Ah yes, your mother. The beautiful daughter of a minor border chieftain.

Pharaoh: You do not think she was a fit wife for Pharaoh.

Hatsakhmet: Pharaoh may have *anyone* to wife. They tell me you plow half the females in Egypt. Your mother was just another woman for Pharaoh. She was not fit to be the *mother* of a Pharaoh.

Pharaoh: My divine father believed she was fit to mother Pharaoh.

Hatsakhmet: Your father was following Imhotep's advice. Imhotep who even as a very young

man prided himself on his scientific knowledge. She was selected, poor thing, because she came from a family of strong breeders. She was selected as one selects a brood mare. A very simple stupid woman your mother, honorable nephew.

Pharaoh: She was a good mother to her son.

Hatsakhmet: And you are certainly a good son. Much better than my son. You loved her -- in so much I suppose you are capable of loving anyone.

Pharaoh: My father loved her. He took no other women.

Hatsakhmet: You would like to believe that, wouldn't you. That your father loved her.

Pharaoh: It is true. She was divinely beautiful.

Hatsakhmet: But not divine. Your father never loved her.

Pharaoh: How are you so certain?

Hatsakhmet: Your father was a divine being. True Pharaohs can only love other divine beings. Your father knew that.

Pharaoh: So you think he should have loved his only sister?

Hatsakhmet: He did love me. Pharaohs have always married their sisters. In this they are the children of the wolf god Horus.

Pharaoh: But he did not want you in that way?

Hatsakhmet: He loved me and he wanted me -- only me. You know nothing. He worshiped me and he worshiped my body. Our bodies beat with the same heart until he betrayed me. You laugh at me. You think this is the delusion of a bitter old woman. I tell you he married your mother only because of Imhotep.

Pharaoh: Imhotep?

Hatsakhmet: Imhotep with his science and sorcery convinced your father that all the deaths in the family and his own physical weakness were due to inbreeding. As if Pharaohs, the sons of Re, were only brood animals. And so he convinced your father to take a wife from lesser clay. Your father may have temporarily wanted her beauty, but he never cared for your mother. *We* were blood of the same blood, flesh of the same flesh. *We* were the last of the children of Pharaoh. *We* were Egypt's destiny. And because your father rejected his destiny, rejected me, Egypt is now cursed.

Pharaoh: He rejected you, and so you went out and got pregnant by someone else.

Hatsakhmet: Fool. I would never have contaminated my womb with the seed of a mere mortal. It was your father. It was always your father. I bore *him* a child -- a boy child.

Pharaoh: And that child was Moses? Is this what you are trying to say to me. My father told me that your child did not live. You said as much yourself.

Hatsakhmet: That is what I told him. After he became seduced by your mother's beauty, after she became pregnant, he resented me. I, who would bear him his first son, I told him that my child did not live. I told him that my child was born a twisted, deformed, swollen thing. I called him "Egypt." And I, with my own hands, drowned him in the Nile just as Neferatum had counseled your father to do with the infants of Israel. It is a very great irony isn't it. And then I told your father that I found another child in the reeds. I called that child Moses -- child of the Nile. And then I took Moses to my breast, and he nursed as your father had nursed. Your father grew to hate me, but still he could not stop loving me. I had become a poison to him.

Pharaoh: And so Moses is not your son.

Hatsakhmet: That is what I told your father. Why should I tell you more than I told your father. Believe what you will. Believe that the other child of the Nile died at birth, believe that Moses is that child. I do not care.

Pharaoh: If he is my brother, you wish him to be Pharaoh in my stead.

Hatsakhmet: No, your father rejected me. He took what should have been mine, only mine. He took his sacred seed and cast it into the body of swine. Why should I have given him my

splendid son? He had his own son -- a simple-minded son with a beautiful body and the gonads of a pig. I did not give my son to your father, I did not give my son to Egypt. My son is to be *my* vengeance. He will destroy Egypt. He is a bringer of plagues. He is the new God. He has come to vindicate me.

Pharaoh: I don't believe you. He doesn't believe you. He believes he is a Hebrew.

Hatsakhmet: It is convenient for him to believe that. People believe what they choose to believe, honorable nephew. But I have spoken, and I will now prophecy. My son will destroy you. He will wipe you and your seed and your possessions from the face of the earth. My son will destroy Egypt as it is, and as it has always been.

Pharaoh: He says he will leave Egypt, if I let his people go.

Hatsakhmet: But you will never let them go. You are not strong enough.

Narrator: And there was a very grievous murrain. The hand of the Lord was upon the cattle in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep. And still the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go. And Moses took ashes of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses sprinkled it up toward heaven; and it became a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast.

As the narrator speaks we see Moses, with Aaron beside him, sprinkling the ashes toward heaven. Aaron, we notice, is beginning to dress in the style of the high priest, while Moses still wears the clothes of a shepherd. Moses is humble in his posture and Aaron is not. Clearly, however, Aaron how holds himself to be subservient to Moses.

Pharaoh King of Egypt

- Act 4 -

Besenmaat: Damnation, Heti. The water, the frogs, and the dust were bad enough. Plague and catastrophe are one thing. But by the life of Pharaoh, this cursed itching is more than a man can stand.

Heti: I can't walk, I can't eat, I can't sleep. I don't go into the city anymore. What's the point? They look at me and laugh. There walks one of Pharaoh's great sorcerers, they say, covered arse to eyes with boils like the rest of us.

Besenmaat: Pharaoh himself is covered with boils.

Heti: They don't know that, do they? Not the people. Do you suppose this means he is human, Besenmaat? Human like everyone else?

Besenmaat: He's a god all right. He doesn't scratch. We haven't seen a twitch out of him. It's as if the boils weren't even there.

Heti: The Hebrews are boil-less.

Besenmaat: They have their own problems. Neferatum has ordered more beatings and more death.

Heti: But the over-seers are growing afraid, Besenmaat. They may fear the god of these Hebrews now, more even than they fear Neferatum.

Besenmaat: Impossible. Neferatum has been Pharaoh's enforcer and Pharaoh's chief sorcerer for two generations. They have feared him for these last 30 years and more. Since before you and I were born. That sort of fear doesn't die. And the spies tell us that there's plenty dissension among the Hebrews.

Heti: Better dissension than boils.

Moses alone on stage

Moses: Behold, tomorrow I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof even until now. Send therefore now, and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die.

Pharaoh: How bad is the damage, Imhotep?

Imhotep: Bad. We lost most of the flax and the barley. The barley was in the ear, and the flax was balled. Fortunately, there was a great deal less damage to the wheat and the spelt. It is still early in the year for wheat and, on the whole, the younger plants seem to have weathered the hail better.

Pharaoh: And the people?

Imhotep: Those that listened to Moses, those that brought their folk and their beasts in out of the field, fared fairly well. He did give us adequate warning. The others lost a great deal. The land is littered with dead, and the word through the land is that the only path to survival during this time of cataclysm is to listen to Moses who speaks truly with God. Perhaps, my King, we have been judged and found wanted. Does it matter what the source of our misery is? Our people think it is Moses' god, but does it matter?

Pharaoh: It doesn't end, does it, Imhotep, I grow ill with the weariness of it. This iniquity that strikes at the heart of our land does not end.

Imhotep: I have come to believe that only you, your Majesty, can end it. It will only end, if you agree to let these Hebrews go.

Pharaoh: Oh I do. I agree after every plague. I ask Moses to lift the curse, and I tell him I will let his people go.

Imhotep: And every time he does lift the curse you change your mind.

Pharaoh: Yes.

Imhotep: Let them go, my Lord. Nothing less will satisfy this god of theirs. And perhaps nothing less will save Egypt. Each plague has been worse than the one before it. What are you buying time for?

Neferatum: Pharaoh has sent for Balaam the son of Peor.

Imhotep: Balaam the Mesopotamian Seer? The man is said to be totally shatter-brained.

Pharaoh: But a very effective shatter-brain it seems.

Neferatum: Those that he curses are truly cursed, and those that he blesses are truly blessed.

Imhotep: That's what they say. They also say that while his gift of prophecy is astounding the man is not very reliable. And you will have him curse these Hebrews?

Neferatum: That is the plan. He took some convincing.

Imhotep: I know the family. They always take some convincing, but if you offer enough gold, silver, and fine cloth, they always come. What makes you think that he *can* curse them effectively, Neferatum. By the gods, we have cursed them in every way we know, and we have powerful curses. They seem to have simply swallowed up our curses and grown fat on them.

Neferatum: Balaam is a Semite. Our curses have not been effective because we do not know this god we are cursing. Nor, I think, do our Egyptian gods know this god. If they knew him, they could fight him. You cannot fight, what you do not know. If I had his name, if I knew what he looked like, I too could find a curse -- an incantation. But the god Baal is just such another Semitic deity. They may be cousins these gods. A priest of Baal will know what to do.

(Enter Besenmaat and Balaam. Balaam looks something like a well-fed Teiresias., He is an old man, covered with egg shells. The bird imagery is strong. He will be going to

Balak son of Zippor.)

Besenmaat: Oh Divine Majesty, Who Risest Like thy Father the Sun, the Seer Balaam son of Peor has arrived.

(Balaam comes forward and bows.)

Neferatum: We welcome you Balaam the son of Peor.

Balaam: I have come Raamses the son of Raamses, because you sent for me. That's why I came. Or at least I think it is. By the grace of Baal this place stinks of death, doesn't it?

Imhotep: You came also, Balaam, because Pharaoh offered you gold and silver and precious cloth.

Balaam: That too, there's no question that I have a weakness for gold and silver. He offered me beautiful women as well. I have a weakness for them too. And at our age, Neferatum, they don't come eagerly. No they don't. Mores the pity. Raamses, your majesty, may I have a word with you. Without these two. They distract me.

Pharaoh motions for Imhotep and Neferatum to go. Imhotep hesitates but goes.

Pharaoh: Well old man?

Balaam: You sent for me, didn't you.

Pharaoh nods.

Balaam: I forget why.

Pharaoh: I want you to curse the children of Israel, and I will pay you a great deal of money to do so.

Balaam: Right. I could use a great deal of money. I like money.

Pharaoh: They tell me you hate the Hebrews.

Balaam: I can't stand the bastards.

Pharaoh: What is it about them that you hate?

Balaam: I don't know. I've never actually met a Hebrew. It's the prophecy, you see.

Pharaoh: The prophecy?

Balaam: I have had a prophecy just as your father did. God told me that the Hebrews will someday be the death of me. So it stands to reason that I'd hate them, doesn't it.

Pharaoh: It seems eminently reasonable, old man.

Balaam: Right. So I will try to curse them for you. But the problem is that I can't always control what I say. This gift of prophecy is the damndest thing. I can only say what God wants said. He whom God blesses, I must bless, and he whom God curses I must curse. Much as I like gold and silver and women, I can't do otherwise. The words which God puts in my mouth, are the words I speak. I can tell you, it upsets a whole hell of a lot of people when I can't deliver the curses they think they are paying for. That's why I need to be paid in advance. Half the time I wouldn't be paid otherwise. I have the gift of prophecy, no question about it. But it can be a double-edged sword, and that's a fact. All too often my clients don't like what I see. But I will try, I will try my damndest to curse these bastards for you. It'll be for me as well, won't it.

Pharaoh: I understand. I ask only that you do your best to curse them. This Baal of yours. Do you think he is powerful enough to battle the god of the Hebrews?

Balaam: I don't know. The fact is that I don't think in terms of this god and that god. Not anymore. God is just a voice in my head. Of course we know what Baal looks like. We have little Baalim all over the place in Peor. Some are really rather remarkable works of art. And they are all of them spectacularly well hung. But I don't think of them as gods so much as representations of God. The name you use doesn't make a difference. All the gods, all the statues, seem to me to be representations of the same God -- the same voice. I think at times we think we need to see our God, but I don't know why. I mean these Baalim, these statues, they don't see *us* do they?

Pharaoh: And you are convinced that this nameless, disembodied voice you hear is the true god?

Balaam: When he speaks to me, I am convinced.

Pharaoh: Your divine world is very simple it seems. As is Moses'?

Balaam: Yes, it's nothing like the chaos of the Egyptians pantheon. But the problem is that there is precious little room for negotiation with my god. There's no threatening him. If there is only one god, you can't hope to pit one god against another. He is what he is, and he does what he does. And since I left home to come to you, I have been getting more and more worried about what He's up to.

Pharaoh: With all these plagues any rational person would be worried.

Balaam: Oh I make no claim to be a rational person. Prophets are never rational. It stands to reason that if you were rational, you wouldn't be a prophet. You'd go into something safe like public administration. And it isn't the plagues. It's my ass.

Pharaoh: Your ass?

Balaam: Yes. I'm worried sick about my ass. No, not that ass, my four-legged ass. All the way here, my ass was telling me that it did not want to come. Not in words, you understand, my ass rarely speaks, but it was doing everything to avoid coming. I had to make generous use of my whip, I tell you. I beat the poor thing the whole way.

Pharaoh: Your ass is not the prophet, Balaam, you are.

Balaam: I wouldn't be so sure of that either. My ass has always had something of a gift for prophecy. Balaam's ass is a more reliable prophet than most of the two-legged prophets I know. If God was sending a message through my ass, you and I are in big trouble. Still, I will try to curse these people for you. I will try my damndest.

Pharaoh: Your ass notwithstanding, all anyone of us can do is try.

Balaam: And that is God's truth.

The next scene is done as spectacle and therefore -- in a sense -- without words. When the narrator and the others are not speaking, there will be music. It should be some variation of "Ma Tovv" the morning prayer that begins with Balaam's benediction. Like Ravel's Bolero it should build. The standard melody is very haunting and it "builds" well.

Narrator: And it came to pass on the morrow that Neferatum took Balaam to a place where Balaam could overlook the people of Israel. And Balaam said to Neferatum, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams. And Balaam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram. And Balaam took up his parable and he said:

Balaam: (Balaam's voice changes here. He is not an old, weak, slightly mad man. He speaks in the voice of prophecy) How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord God hath not defied?

Narrator: And Neferatum took him to another place and Balaam sacrificed there seven oxen and seven rams. And Balaam lifted up his eyes to the heaven and he said:

Balaam: God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Narrator: And Neferatum said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all. But Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in their tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him and Balaam the son of Peor, the man whose eyes were opened said:

Balaam: How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as aloe trees which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.

Narrator: And Balaam fled Egypt and the plagues continued. The hail was followed by a plague of locusts. And they, the locusts, ate the residue of that which escaped destruction in the hail. And again Pharaoh agreed to let the Hebrews go, but again he hardened his heart against Moses, after Moses had caused the locusts to be swept away.

Moses: You sent for Balaam, Raamses?

Pharaoh: Much good it did me.

Moses: I imagine it did you no good at all.

Pharaoh: You are so sure of yourself, Moses.

Moses: No, Raamses. I am rarely sure of myself. (Smiling) Fortunately, Aaron is *always* sure of himself.

Pharaoh: Aaron was born a slave. In the moment of truth he will fold, you won't. It is what makes you so dangerous.

Moses: It can't be that simple. We are all men, Raamses. We will live, we will die, and we will be judged as men.

Pharaoh: We are all to live by the sweat of our brows? All beasts of burden in this brave new world of yours, and you mean to be king of these beasts. You would be King in Israel, and King in Egypt.

Moses: No. I will be gone from Egypt. And I am not the King of Israel.

Pharaoh: You are single-handedly forging a nation out of a rag tag rabble of desert barbarians.

Moses: Perhaps I am their leader, but I am not their king.

Pharaoh: It certainly sounds like kingship to me.

Moses: No, we have no King but God. And whoever leads must walk with God. So when my time comes I will find some younger man, place my hands on his shoulders, and wish him strength and good courage. And he will take up the burden. That is what being a leader is about. Being strong and of good courage.

Pharaoh: That and walking with god, and being filled with shame and confusion, and practicing justice in this new weakly effeminate way you speak of. It sounds a contradiction to me.

Your leader is to be strong, courageous and weak.

Moses: Merely human. Raamses, I know you do not understand. Perhaps you cannot understand. Only admit that there are forces in the universe you do not understand, and that you cannot control. Admit that at the least. Then you will be able to let my people go. Not for my sake or their sake or even your sake. Let them go for the sake of this Egypt, this oasis in the desert you tell me you love.

Pharaoh: Go then. Go all of you. You Moses are traitor to our love, to our land, to our blood and to our people. Get the hell out of my sight and take all your barbarians and go. I am sick to death of you, and your Hebrew god. Do you want me to abase myself. To say the words. I *can* say the words, Moses. I have learned the form of this thing you call repentance.

Moses: I want only that you let the people go, Raamses. The words with which you do so are between you and God.

Pharaoh: Go and end this iniquity which smites my land.

Narrator: And Moses went into the wilderness and called upon God and there came a mighty west wind which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red sea; and there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt.

We see Pharaoh, his Queen and their two sons – a glimpse of Pharaoh as attentive husband and a loving and indulgent father. Pharaoh is human. Neferatum and Imhotep come on stage and Pharaoh, reluctantly, motions his family away.

Neferatum: Divinity, you do not realize the danger. You are the body, the blood, and the soul that is Egypt. Without you, without kingship, Egypt will be destroyed. To think that your sacred father let this viper into his family, that your aunt took this viper to her breast. Had my counsel been followed Moses would have been killed at birth and we would have been spared. Give me leave to free your land of this contamination.

Pharaoh: Yes, old man, it is time – past time – have Moses killed – and Aaron as well. I should have had it done years ago.

Neferatum: It may take a few days, but you may consider it done, your Majesty.

Imhotep: Even that may not end the plagues.

Pharaoh: It will certainly not end the plagues if the plagues are, as we believe they are, simply natural disasters. But Moses and their god will no longer be credited with these plagues. It will end the slave revolt, and the hints of revolt amongst our own people. Once Egypt is again at peace with herself, we will work to repair the damage wrought by the plagues, and Egypt will heal.

Imhotep: Can we kill Moses and Aaron?

Pharaoh: Why not? Moses himself tells me he is but a man of flesh and blood with arms and legs. He tells me I am but a man as well. If we are all only men we are all distressingly mortal. Men can be killed.

Imhotep: His god has become exceedingly powerful.

Pharaoh: And our gods seem to have become exceedingly weak. We should take that as a lesson in godship and in kingship.

Imhotep: Your majesty?

Pharaoh: Both gods and kings should kill their enemies, while they still can.

Imhotep: Moses never seemed to be your enemy.

Pharaoh: Perhaps it is wise to kill a fair number of our friends as well -- just as a preventative measure.

Imhotep: A great man should not need to do so.

Pharaoh: Perhaps so, Imhotep. Not in ordinary times. But these are extraordinary times. Our world is desperately out of balance. All the elements have conspired against us. I do not know how else to make it right.

Messenger (Ishpi) comes on stage. He's looks about eighteen. He's one of Imhotep's Egyptian spies among the Israelites. He meets Besenmaat.

Messenger: I've come to report to Imhotep. I am one of Pharaoh's spies.

Besenmaat: Wait here a moment.

Imhotep: Welcome, Ishpi. You have news?

Messenger: Yes, Sir. Bad news.

Imhotep: That seems the only kind we've had recently.

Messenger: I came as soon as I could see to come. You know that Moses has gathered together the Hebrews. There are 600,000 and that doesn't count all of us Egyptians who have joined them. We were in the camp that day. Moses had gone out unto the mountain to recall the locusts and when the west wind had come to clear them away he came down amongst us again. There was great rejoicing in the camp, I can tell you. And the Egyptians have been showering their wealth and their jewels on the Jews in the hope of fending off the plagues.

Imhotep: Moses is growing rich?

Messenger: No, Sir. Not him. He doesn't take it. He leaves it to the women and the priests. He talks to us of humility and of virtue and he practices those things as well. It's funny, how after a while, you stop noticing the stutter, isn't it? He delivered his sermon that day like he does most days.

Imhotep: Sermon?

Messenger: That day he talked about how God wants us all to be humble and to think not on the wealth of the world but on the wealth of the spirit. He told us that to follow the commandments of the Lord was to delight in life. You know the sort of thing.

Imhotep: No, I'm not sure that I do.

Messenger: He's educating the Hebrews in the ways of this new God, and there are a precious lot of dos and donts in Moses' idea of religion. But most of us figure its worth it -- if we can avoid the plagues. And then afterwards, after the sermon, he and Aaron, who had been standing beside him, dropped back down from where they were standing, and walked amongst us surrounded by a handful of his people. It happened then.

Imhotep: What happened?

Neferatum has come out of the palace and is quietly listening unnoticed by anyone except Besenmaat.

Messenger: Suddenly a group of men surrounded them cutting Moses and Aaron off. And they had knives in their hands. Some of those knives were ones our ritual sorcerers use. Aaron raised his staff as if to strike at them, but Moses just stood there quietly and asked, 'who are you?' although he had to have recognized two of his own lieutenants, I think. And he wasn't stuttering then. Not at that moment. He was deadly calm. We come, they said, from Pharaoh and from Neferatum, and we come to kill you, the maker of plagues. And so, they struck all together as one man.

Heti: Moses and Aaron are dead?

Messenger: No. They're not dead. In that very moment the darkness came. One moment it was day and the next it was pitch black night. We heard the screams, but we couldn't see them. We couldn't see anyone. Then we heard Moses, stuttering, but calm. He assured us that all was as it should be. The darkness had lifted a little by then -- at least there amongst the Hebrews -- and we could see that all of the assassins had been struck down. *(Still unnoticed, Neferatum goes back into the palace. Besenmaat hesitates a moment and follows him.)* Struck down, Moses said, by the spirit of God. I left the camp to come and tell you, but at the border the darkness was complete. We had to wait days for Moses to lift it. And then we came.

Besenmaat comes out of the palace.

Heti: Besenmaat, what is it. What in god's name is it now?

Besenmaat: Neferatum heard him. Then he just turned and went into the palace. I was worried

so I followed him. When I came to him he had lifted his own staff and taken the serpents' head off leaving the sharp edge. And then he spoke commending himself to the gods he had dutifully served all of his life, and he drove the staff into his chest falling on it to his death. I came to tell you. They ready the body for funeral.

Pharaoh King of Egypt

- Act 5 -

Spectacle: Act 5 begins with the funeral of Neferatum in the background. It is carried out with pomp and circumstance.

Pharaoh: Neferatum is dead. It is the death of an era, Imhotep.

Imhotep: An era of certainty, your majesty.

Pharaoh: Yes, certainty is dead. He is being buried where it is most fitting, in my Father's Court. I have given him a proper burial complete with carved servants to see him on his way. I made certain none of the laborers who prepared the grave were beaten and none were Hebrews. That much I have learned.

Imhotep: Yes, Your Majesty. We have all learned a great deal to our cost. Your majesty I pray you yield. Let them go. How long shall this man be a snare to us? Egypt is being destroyed?

Pharaoh: Yes, I know that Egypt is being destroyed, Imhotep, even as we speak. The land is in confusion. It's not simply the plagues although they are bad enough. Our irrigation system is in disarray, our enemies are surrounding us, our nation has become a chaos of warring tribes, and the land is deprived of kingship.

Imhotep: Then as you love life and hate death, yield. Yield and Egypt will survive. Give us the time to heal, your majesty. To bind up our wounds and to care for those who have born the brunt of this suffering.

Pharaoh: Yes, we will survive, but perhaps not as we once were, not in our full greatness. And perhaps Egypt will have survived only to be invaded by Babylonians and Assyrians, mad butchers of men who are without art and science and beauty. We will have survived only to be eaten by the vultures.

Imhotep: No, your vision of the future is too bleak, my Lord. The plagues have eaten into your soul -- the soul of Egypt. Only yield to their God and we will rid this land of its despair.

Pharaoh: The nameless god? That is our problem you know, Imhotep, the old gods are dead, and we have not yet found a name for the new gods. I do not know how to call out to them. I do not know how speak to them.

Imhotep: This nameless god wants only our capitulation. He is powerful enough to force our capitulation. There is no dishonor in surrender to an overwhelmingly superior force. Surrender and we will live to fight other battles. If you do not surrender, Egypt will continue to suffer. You, your majesty, are our head and our heart. You are the God by whose judgements we live, the father and mother of all Egypt. But it is the body of Egypt, the common clay, the common men and women, who are made to suffer the costs of this battle. It is the land itself that is being raped and beaten.

Moses comes on stage alone with Pharaoh

Pharaoh: Why have you come? To gloat?

Moses: Why, only because I am still alive? That was none of my doing. No, Raamses, I have come one last time, as a friend, to beg you, and to warn you.

Pharaoh: You, like Imhotep, ask me to surrender.

Moses: No, I ask you only to let the people go.

Pharaoh: And your god?

Moses: My God prefers repentance, rather than surrender -- but He will settle for surrender. And

believe me, Raamses, repentance is a great deal more difficult to manage.

Pharaoh: I mean to abase myself. Every time there is a plague and every time I say they may go, I intend to abase myself. But I cannot do it, Moses. Something stops me.

Moses: Perhaps you stop yourself.

Pharaoh: Perhaps that essence of me that is of the gods says to that clay of me that is of the earth, we will not be bested by this god of Israel. And that is what he wants to do, Moses. He wants the whole of the world to see the gods of Egypt, the Pharaoh, brought low and to the ground at his feet. He will settle for no less. I wouldn't in his place.

Moses: Perhaps, Raamses. But perhaps he means simply to redress an injustice. We have been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years. How many of our lives have been sacrificed? How much of our blood? I came in the beginning and begged you. Had you let them go, you would have saved your gods at least in your own mind and in the minds of the Egyptians, and you, and Egypt, and the children of Israel would have been spared all this suffering. I have come to beg you again.

(And for the first time in the play Moses falls to his knees before Pharaoh. He kisses Pharaoh's feet. Pharaoh doesn't appear to notice.)

Pharaoh: And if I do not yield an even worse plague will follow, Moses?

Moses: Yes.

Pharaoh: I see. *(Pharaoh sits down beside Moses. Moses shifts into a sitting position. And Pharaoh, his hand on Moses' forearm seems almost to be comforting him.)* More blood and more death. Do you remember that night my mare was heavy with foal and dying. We were eight I think.

Moses: I remember. We sat there for hours, two boys, helplessly watching her die.

Pharaoh: When she was so exhausted with pain and she lay there spent, old Wenamun, the horse tender, stuck his arms into her bloody womb and somehow managed to turn the foal. There was so much blood.

Moses: But the mare lived and the foal lived, by the grace of God.

Pharaoh: And by the efforts of Wenamun. And for a few moments all was right in our world.
When I am near despair, I reach back to that perfect peace.

Moses: Only you can end this pain, Raamses. Say the words that will return the world to sunlight.
Say the words for the sake of the children we once were, for the sake of our love.

Pharaoh: I can't do it, cousin. The words you need won't come.

Moses: You *must* let them come, Raamses. Only you can end these plagues. Let my people go,
and by next year we will be only a memory which you will erase from your history books.
The Nile will rise and flood. The crops will come. And Egypt will be as it has always
been.

Pharaoh: I can't. So, what is it to be? What is the next plague, cousin?

Moses: The next plague will be the last plague. God will take the firstborn of Egypt.

Pharaoh: There is something of justice in that I suppose. My father took all the male newborn of
Israel. Not very effectively it seems.

Moses: Yield, Raamses, and spare them. Spare Egypt.

Pharaoh: *Is* it just to let the innocent die to avenge the deeds of a dead Pharaoh?

Moses: No.

Pharaoh: We Egyptians understand injustice and evil. We can account for it. We have whole
catalogues of gods and spirits and when the world is out of balance -- evil -- we know
they have taken to fighting amongst themselves. It makes perfect sense. But you have
only the one god – only the one good and benevolent god. And yet look what he does.

Moses: Raamses, repent, and spare your own people.

Pharaoh: You know, I don't think your God wants me to repent. He has a point to make.

Moses: And you, are you willing to die so that He can make His point?

Pharaoh: I am, in fact, rather eager to die at the moment Moses. And I *am* my father's first born.

Moses: You are your father's only male child.

Pharaoh: At least by your account if not Hatsakhmet's. Is death so unacceptable an alternative? I am weary and my limbs are the limbs of a man of ninety. I am desiccated. There will be no blood in me for the embalmers to drain. Of course, I have not completed much work on my pyramid. But that makes little difference as slave labor has proven hard to come by. And my Book of Dead is only half written.

Moses: Let my people go and you will be inscribed in the Book of Life. If you do not repent, Egypt will be left in the hands of a child.

Pharaoh: And is that so bad? It is easier for a child to repent. It is easier for a child to surrender to the wonder of things. It is easier for a child to live untroubled in the sun light. It is easier for a child to erase history.

Narrator: And the Lord said to Moses: I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord.

(Moses alone on stage)

Oh God, and God of my Fathers, from the end of the earth I cry unto thee, my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to an understanding that is greater than mine.

Oh God and God of my Fathers, You are a God who delightest in Life. You ask that we the living tell our sons of our redemption from Egypt. And we will do so in every generation. You ask me to curse Amalek. I can curse Amalek when his hand is raised against me. I can strike Amalek when he surrounds me with murder in his heart. But this piecemeal destruction of Amalek fills me with fear and trembling.

Oh God and God of my Fathers, make Pharaoh repent, and end the suffering.

The waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.

For thy sake, I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children.

My prayer is unto thee, O Lord: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation.

And deliver my brother Raamses out of the mire, and let him not sink: let both Israel and Egypt be delivered out of the deep waters.

Oh God, and God of my Fathers, cause Pharaoh to repent.

Hear me, O Lord, hide not thy face from thy servant. Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it.

Thou hast made the earth to tremble; thou hast broken it: now heal the breaches thereof; for it shaketh.

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to thee, Oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Pharaoh King of Egypt

- Act 6 -

Narrator: And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead.

Spectacle: Lamentations.

We see Pharaoh. His first born in his arms. He is ministering tenderly to the body of his child.

Pharaoh: See, Imhotep, he rests still in his father's arms. He is his mother's first born. I had

forgotten that. Why can't I part with him even as he grows cold?

Imhotep: Your Majesty, let me take him to the priests.

Pharaoh: No...No... His mother hates me. I don't blame her. I hate myself, poor miserable forked creature that I am.

Imhotep: We will make a temple for him, Raamses, and a Book of the Dead. There will be pavilions for his soul. He will go on to life eternal.

Pharaoh: And all the others? The thousands who died because I did not bend. There is not enough clay in Egypt to make the bricks for their pavilions? What have I done? The Land is in misery, mourning is in every place. Towns and villages lament.

Imhotep: You have been a King in Egypt.

Pharaoh: It is an Egypt for the dead, and not for the living.

Imhotep: The greatness of Egypt will live on.

Pharaoh: Let them go, Imhotep. Let the Hebrews go.

Imhotep: Yes, your majesty, they go even as we speak.

Narrator: And Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go. And the Hebrews baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual.

Moses: (Holds up a plate of Matzahs and says:)

And this is the bread of affliction
which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.
Let all who are hungry come and eat.

Pharaoh: They are gone, Imhotep?

Imhotep: Yes. All of them. Men, women, children, animals. The people, at least were happy to see them go.

Pharaoh: The people will be less happy to do the labor of slaves.

Imhotep: (shrugs) The people will be alive.

(Pharaoh begins to strip off the regalia that he has been barricading himself in.)

Pharaoh: Yes, the people will be alive . . . I have decided to go after them, Imhotep.

Imhotep: Go after them?

Pharaoh: With 1200 men and 600 chariots.

Imhotep: After them? In the name of Isis, why, your majesty?

Pharaoh: To bring them back.

Imhotep: But you can't bring them back with a few hundred men and half again as many chariots. We are speaking of 600,000 people.

Pharaoh: Still, I am going. Do you see the map, Imhotep? Your spies have kept us informed. Moses has led them into a trap. Instead of following the coast to go up to this promised land of Canaan he has turned southward along the Red Sea. Near the Bitter Lakes. They are camped along the Red Sea with no way of crossing. The mountains surround them in two directions, the sea from the third, and I will be coming from the fourth. I should be able to herd them like animals.

Imhotep: Yes, your Majesty, I see. But is he trapping them, or is he trapping you? I admit that I see no way in which they can spring loose, not 600,000 men, but it seems too easy. It feels like a trap.

Pharaoh: Yes, it does, doesn't it. It feels like a trap. But it doesn't matter, Imhotep. I am

going..

Imhotep: My King, Soul of Egypt, I implore you not to lead those chariots. Let the Hebrews go. So we will have a few less temples, what are a few less temples? You are only human.

Pharaoh: But I refuse to be only human, Imhotep. If I am only human, than I am not Pharaoh. The chariots will be harnessed, and I will go. Commend me to my younger son. I have appointed you his regent in the event I do not return. Take good care of my son, Imhotep, and take good care of Egypt.

Imhotep: No, your majesty. I cannot do it. I am no king.

Pharaoh: Then be a leader. (He smiles and puts his hands on Imhotep's shoulders.) Be strong and of good courage, my friend.

Narrator: The Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baalzephon.

Messenger comes (the young Egyptian whom we saw before.)

Besenmaat and Heti are also on stage, but he speaks to Imhotep to begin with.

Messenger: Sir, honorable Sir?

Imhotep: Yes, you come from the camp? You know what happened?

Messenger: Honorable Sir, a moment. Please a moment. Let me drink. I almost didn't make it. Three of us left the camp running. The others fell by the wayside. A moment.

Imhotep: How bad is it, son?

Messenger: Bad.

Imhotep: Tell us. We won't kill the messenger. It's not the Egyptian thing to do, and we are all Egyptians here, aren't we? Civilized men. How bad is it, son?

Messenger: Bad, Sir. As bad as anything we've seen so far. And wondrous as well. We were all settled there huddled by the edge of the sea. It had been days. Moses was up in the hill talking to the air as he always does. And there was a great deal of unrest in the camp, I can tell you that. Dathan and Abiram, two of Moses' enemies among the people, were preaching sedition again. They wanted to go back to Egypt. They asked if there weren't enough graves in Egypt, why did we have to leave Egypt to die like wild animals in the desert. But the pillar of cloud didn't move, Sir.

Imhotep: The pillar of cloud?

Messenger: Yes, Sir. The pillar of cloud. It's how we knew where to go. We followed a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And the pillar of cloud just sat there becalmed, and so we waited. Then the scouts Aaron had posted up in the hills, the scouts saw that Pharaoh was coming. There we were pinned like sheep for the slaughter and Pharaoh in all his splendor and hundreds of chariots and hundreds of horses were coming down out of the hills to run us into the sea. We thought it was over. Even Moses must have thought so. And I saw him, him and Aaron, up there, in the hills -- praying.

Besenmaat: What happened?

Messenger: Nothing at first, Sir. But there was one man, Nachshon. He's the son of Aminadab, of the tribe of Judah. The bravest man I ever saw or the most foolish. I don't rightly know which. He stood there in the midst of the multitude and called out, 'What are we waiting for?' He called up to Moses and said 'this is no time for prayer. This is a time for faith.' Then Dathan shouted back 'Nachshon, look, there is water there and we will be mown down, or we will drown.' And Nachshon just laughed in his face and said 'We are Jews. We will learn how to live under water.' And then he just walked into that water. And he kept walking until it was up to his neck and pretty soon a hundred other people started following him. I suppose they thought it was better to die drowning than to die trampled. But it was more than that. I think most followed him because they believed -- they had faith. And then it happened. The pillar of cloud became a pillar of wind.

Heti: A tornado?

Messenger: I suppose so. And the wind whipped the sea. It seemed to whip a path through the sea and people could walk. The men took the children up in their arms. The women came beside them. Their arms around each other. Each of them helping the other. And the animals just sloshed across beside their masters. And Aaron and Moses came down off the mountain to follow Nachshon and the people. No one panicked, but it seemed to take forever, and all the while Pharaoh kept coming closer. Only now we couldn't see him because the pillar of cloud was between us and the chariots.

Imhotep. Did you go across?

Messenger: No Sir. I was terrified. It parted for them because they were Jews. I knew that. I wasn't certain, but my friend Khafra went, and the water came and swept him off his feet. I knew that their God wasn't going to let me pass through being as I was a spy.

Heti: And then?

Messenger: And then just as the last of them were passing over -- Aaron and Moses together -- Pharaoh reached the shore. I could see Moses most of the way across holding up his hand with the staff still in it as if to stop Pharaoh. I could almost hear him call 'No! Stay back.' I swear he was trying to warn Pharaoh. But it was too late. They wouldn't have stopped. I don't think they could have stopped. And Pharaoh went into the sea with all his chariots.

Besenmaat. Did they make it to the other side?

Messenger: No, Sir. Pharaoh and the chariots were in the sea and the pillar of cloud rose up high in the air and went before the column of the people and when it did that the waters came crashing together into the sea. Perhaps some of them could have been saved but they were so close together and the horses were frenzied. I watched. A handful of foot soldiers saved themselves. Everyone else was lost. All lost. At the end I could see Moses on dry land reaching out a hand to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh rising up in that chariot like a God, whip in hand, whipping his horses forward even as the waters broke. By the life of Pharaoh, he was without fear at the end.

Heti. He was Pharaoh. Soul of Egypt, alone by himself without equal.

Narrator: Woe unto the world because of offense, for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.... As it was said 3000 years ago, so still must it be said:

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul:
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.
The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart:
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever:
the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

And the narrator reads the first lines of the Mourner's Kaddish in English.
Glorified and sanctified be the Name of the Lord throughout all the world

Yisgaddal, v'yiskaddash shmey rabboh...

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