

Father, Forgive

By Hilary Mackelden

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Father, Forgive

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DEDICATION

John Large,
The best father anyone ever had this side of heaven.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Thirty-three years ago, a group of six soldiers, under orders from Herod the Great, entered Bethlehem. When they left, seventeen small boys were dead. One of the fathers, Simeon, tried for revenge, killed three of the soldiers, and has languished, forgotten, in prison since. Now, the last living soldier, Jeremiah, is a powerful judge in Jerusalem. His enemies want rid of him, and when they learn of Simeon, it seems the perfect solution to their problem. They release Simeon and send him after Jeremiah. Meanwhile, Jeremiah's teenage son, Reuben, wants to follow the maverick rabbi, Jesus, and when his father tries to stop him, Reuben leaves home. On the night Jesus is arrested, Reuben finds himself caught up in the chaos on the streets where Simeon encounters him and sees the perfect revenge— he will kill Jeremiah's son before he kills the man himself...

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 m, 2 w, and extras.)

SIMEON: A man living for revenge; 57 years-old, ragged and sallow, his beard and hair unkempt. Abigail's husband.

JEREMIAH: Chief Justice, a man with military bearing and a natural authority, 50 years-old, distinguished, successful, a man in his prime. Hannah's husband.

ABIGAIL: Loyal and loving but careworn; 55 years-old. Simeon's wife.

MICAH: A judge, he is 35, a man who wears his wealth and position proudly.

ELI: A soldier, 40 years-old.

HANNAH: A well-cared-for woman; 40 years-old. Jeremiah's wife.

REUBEN: Jeremiah and Hannah's son, 17.

EXTRAS: Men and women as part of a crowd.

SOUND DESIGN

Background sound is important in this play. Happy children noises, angry crowds with running feet and shouts of "Barabbas!", cheers, crying children and silence set the tone in various scenes. These noises can be pre-recorded or performed live backstage.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act I

- Scene 1: Chaos dream
- Scene 2: Prison cell
- Scene 3: Micah's office
- Scene 4: Prison cell
- Scene 5: Jeremiah's home
- Scene 6: Simeon's home
- Scene 7: A side street

Act II

- Scene 1: Jeremiah's home
- Scene 2: Micah's office
- Scene 3: Simeon's home
- Scene 4: Micah's office

ACT I

Scene 1

(The stage is in darkness. SFX: Sounds carry through the darkness: sobs, screams, shouts. Swords clash against swords, wood bangs, fire crackles. Chaos reigns. The sounds continue through the scene. A SPOTLIGHT comes up, stage right, on SIMEON. He is ragged and sallow, his beard and hair unkempt. He looks around in a slow motion, frantically, searching. His voice is also slowed down.)

SIMEON: *(Shouting.)* SAMUEL! SOLOMON!

(HE tries to move forward but cannot. His feet seem stuck fast. His body moves slowly, ponderously, as if in a dream. He stretches out, desperately, but cannot reach what he is aiming for. His face contorts in agony and he mouths the names, screaming them silently. His SPOTLIGHT fades. A second SPOTLIGHT comes up, stage left, on JEREMIAH. HE holds a sword, but he wields it defensively, not offensively. Like Simeon's, his movements have a slow, dream-like quality. He is aware of danger surrounding him, but is unable to see it. He twists and turns frantically, looking for it, putting up his sword to ward it off and protect himself. Simeon's SPOTLIGHT comes up again. He reaches for what is just beyond him and mouths the names, silent agony contorting his face. Jeremiah slashes at the air around him. They turn towards each other and the SPOTLIGHTS turn blood red. BOTH men freeze. The SPOTLIGHTS disappear, abruptly. The sounds of chaos continue for ten seconds, then stop, suddenly. Silence and darkness.)

Scene 2

(LIGHTS LOW: A sparse prison cell. SFX: Noises of chaos fill the air. SIMEON slumps against a wall, asleep. He moans and tosses about. SFX: The noises grow louder. Simeon comes to with a start and sits bolt upright. The noises stop abruptly. He looks around, sees that it was a dream, breathes out in relief, calms as he comes fully awake. He stands, stretches, and paces the cell. SFX: A lock sounds. Simeon sits down, defiantly nonchalant as the cell door opens. ABIGAIL enters, carrying a bundle. SFX: The door closes behind her and the lock sounds again. Abigail jumps at the harsh sound. Simeon eyes her, dispassionately. She hesitates then puts the bundle at his feet. He shifts his gaze from her to the bundle, then back to her. No flicker of emotion shows on his face. There is an awkward silence.)

ABIGAIL: I brought you some new clothes.

(SIMEON bends and looks into the bundle.)

ABIGAIL: *(Cont'd.)* There were two shirts, but the guard...

(SHE shrugs. HE pulls out the shirt and holds it up for inspection.)

ABIGAIL: *(Cont'd.)* There's food, too. *(Beat.)* The guard took the wine.

(SIMEON pulls bread from the bundle and takes a bite.)

ABIGAIL: *(Cont'd.)* I'm meeting with a judge tomorrow before I return home.

(SIMEON stops eating and gives her his full attention.)

ABIGAIL: *(Cont'd.)* Judge Micah. He's agreed to hear my plea for your release.

(SIMEON'S lip curls in disdain.)

SIMEON: Don't waste your breath.

ABIGAIL: He said he would listen.

(HE grunts a reply and resumes eating.)

ABIGAIL: *(Cont'd.)* I want my husband home, Simeon.

We're at a time in our lives when we should be together.

Growing old together, like other people do. For example, Zaccheus? You remember Zaccheus? Deborah's husband? The butcher?

SIMEON: What about him?

ABIGAIL: He retired. He's bringing her to Jerusalem for the Passover. He's always been too busy before, what with the festival demands, but now...

SIMEON: *(Sneers.)* Now Bethlehem has no butcher.

ABIGAIL: Yes, they do. He passed his shop to his son...

(HE glares at her and SHE trails off. He looks down at the bread with disgust, as if it has turned sour, then drops it back into the bundle.)

SIMEON: Good that he has a son to pass it on to.

(HIS following speech is accusatory and bitter, and he ignores her interjections, speaks over them.)

SIMEON: *(Cont'd.)* I expect they all have by now, don't they?

Sons to replace the lost ones.

ABIGAIL: You can't replace a child—

SIMEON: All happy families. Except us. You blame me for that?

ABIGAIL: No!

SIMEON: You'd have been better off if they had executed me.

ABIGAIL: That's not true.

SIMEON: You could have remarried then.

ABIGAIL: Simeon—

End of Freeview

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